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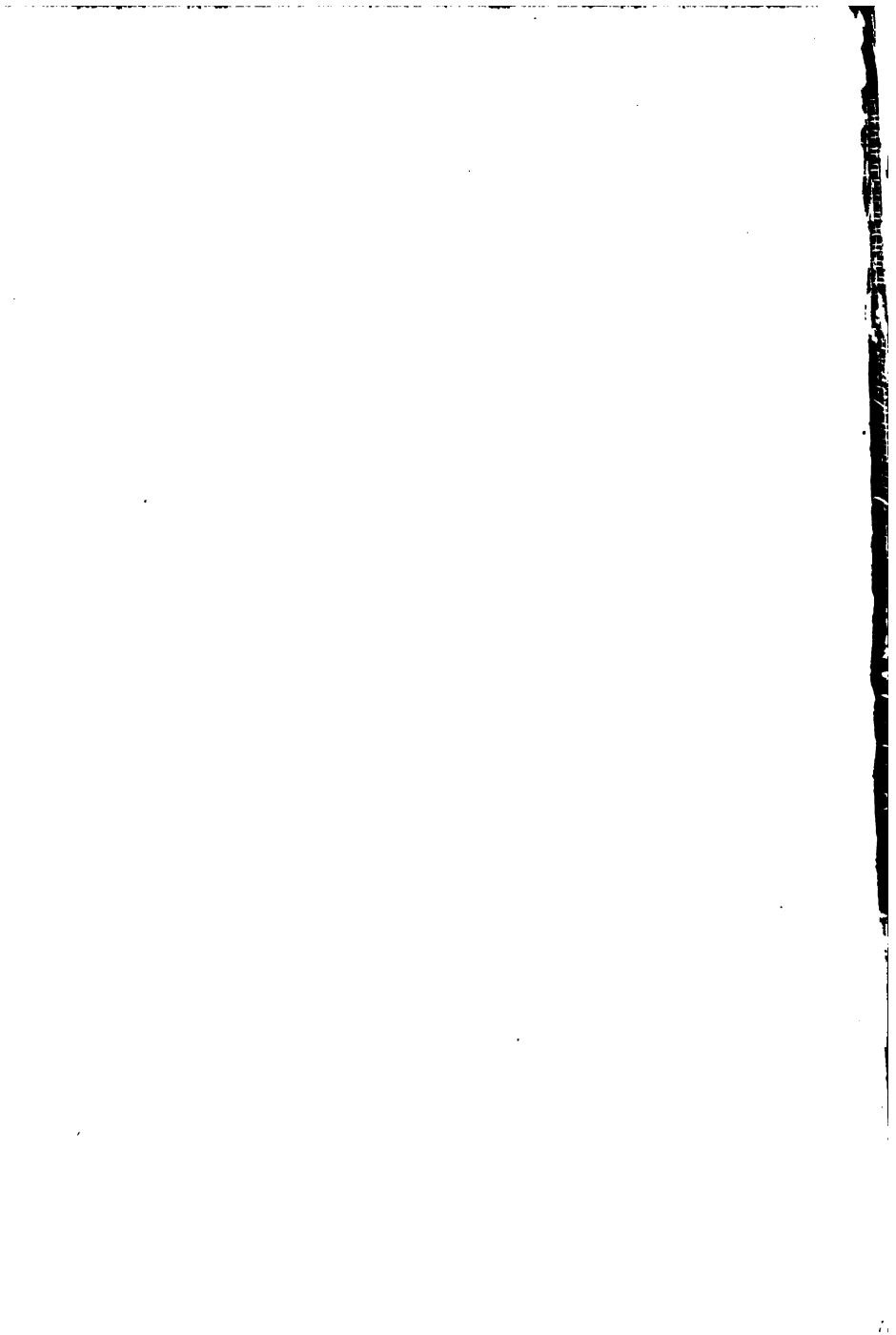
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The Parlor Begat Amos

BY

ARTHUR STURGES HILDEBRAND



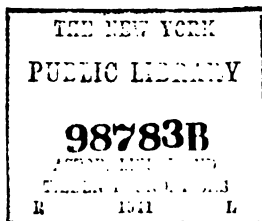
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THE PARLOR BEGAT AMOS

CHAPTER I

PHANOR ENDAY was married to Isabel Webster on the first of January, 1874.

"Crickey, what a day!" he would say, whenever he thought of his wedding. "How it did rain and freeze, and all!"

"Any man that will get married on the first of January don't deserve to have his friends come to see it."

This was the opinion of Edward Pillsbury, a school-time friend of Phanor's. Edward was a traveling salesman and could tell a good story, and Phanor used often to repeat the joke, and laugh about it, especially since the weather of the wedding day turned out to be so awful.

Phanor had chosen to be married on the first of January because he could not possibly wait any longer. This was what he intended Edward, and Isabel, and every one else, to think, and what he intended to think himself.

Phanor's sister Emily was first out of bed on the wedding morning, and as she looked down the garden to see what sort of day it was to be she was filled with apprehension, for she was certain that the worst had

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1874

happened. Sure enough, it was snowing—big fluffy flakes that fell straight and settled wearily, covering the flower-beds and obscuring from sight even the nearest neighbors' houses.

"Oh, my goodness me!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that too terrible for words! Nothing but trouble, every single blessed minute!"

The family had breakfast in the kitchen, that morning, since the other rooms in the house were ripped up in preparation for the wedding, and as they sat around the table, raising their eyes from time to time to glance out at the white world beyond the windows, they wondered in their hearts why nothing could ever go quite right where they were concerned.

Mr. Webster was gloomy and sulky, and kept reminding them of the desperate state of affairs.

"I've seen some mighty bad weather in my time," he told them, boastfully. "But I've never come across anything quite so bad as this. I don't see why it don't show signs of clearing up."

While the dishes were being cleared away he sat at the living-room window, looking out, and turning to speak over his shoulder whenever any one came into the room.

"I've been hoping it would clear up," he would say. "But it don't show any signs of it."

Then Mrs. Webster, or Isabel, or whoever it was, would tell him to stay where he was, and keep out from under foot, and go rushing on to do one of the fifty million things that had to be done, glancing sav-

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agely at him, as if he were sitting there in the window conducting the progress of the weather.

At noon it was raining a warm white rain that made the ground steam, dripping noisily from the leaky gutters of the little old house, running in streams down the garden walks, and generally making life a miserable thing.

By four o'clock, which was the hour set for the ceremony, a bitter wind had come roaring out of the west, the rain stopped, the mist vanished, and the footprints and carriage-tracks in the slush froze hard as iron.


Every one was chilled and discouraged, and felt abused.

"I've been looking for it to clear up, all day," Mr. Webster said. "But I don't see as this . . ."

"Now, father! Don't complain," Mrs. Webster admonished him, sinking wearily into a chair at the other window. "There's enough to think about without that. We'll just have to make the best of it."

Emily Enday, in the background, glared at them, and thought, "Oh, yes; you'll sit there and mope, and leave everything for me to do. What Phanor can be thinking of, to marry into a family like this, I can't see."

She threw a shawl over her head, and went out to pour some boiling water on the thin coating of ice that was beginning to form over the front steps, to avoid, at least, one more possibility of tragedy. The wedding guests were all somewhat decrepit, because of a con-



genital timidity of spirit, and their bones were deemed valuable. When they began to arrive, she found a place for them to put their things, and it was she who saw to it that their umbrellas weren't mixed. She was almost the only person present capable of constructive activity, and her energy accentuated the helplessness of the others.

They all felt that a wedding day was the happiest of all possible days, but they said nothing of it, on this occasion, for fear of contradiction. With weather like this, there simply wasn't any use in pretending to be happy.

As a matter of fact, a wedding day, in the families of the Endays and the Websters, was a day on which special precautions must be taken against unpleasant occurrences.

"Well, I hope the minister gets here, that's all," said Phanor's aunt Edna. "After us coming all this way! "

"The train was late," said old Mr. Enday. "Twenty minutes, wasn't it, Emily? Weren't we twenty minutes late getting to the junction? Seems to me I heard somebody say so."

"Well, we're here now," Emily answered. "What I'm worried about is getting home again. If the harbor should freeze, so's the boat didn't run, we'd be in a fix."

"I've seen it freeze, clear out into the Sound," Mr. Enday said. "About five years ago, wasn't it? When was it we had that hard winter? Seems to me

it was about five years ago. Why, we didn't have any boats, then, for more than three weeks. They went out with sleds to the edge of the pack, but they couldn't land anything. Or did they get some of the mail ashore? I forget."

Phanor and Isabel resented all this pessimism. After all, they were the ones who were being married.

Their marriage was not an unhappy one, as marriages go—and can there be any other criterion?—but it had bad weather in it, as time went on, with exactly the same senseless perversity of bad weather in daily life. They felt the symbolism of it, and thought that a stormy wedding day was quite the natural thing for them.

"You might know it would be rotten!" Phanor said.

"Isn't it just like it to be so horrid!" sighed Isabel.

It seemed as if even the arrival of the minister would be unable to make any change in the depressing atmosphere.

Mrs. Webster was confused by the uproar, and the excitement of having so many people about, but she held out bravely, and refused all suggestions of lying down to get a little rest. When the guests began to arrive, she made an effort, and kept in sight, so that she might be interviewed.

She made them all feel that Isabel might have married almost any one. But she admitted that she was

greatly pleased with the present match, and confessed to being happy in the thought that the Arrow of Cupid—this was the phrase she used—had so beautifully struck its mark, and had, at the same time, pointed so unmistakably in the direction of good sense.

There had been other suitors—oh, yes, indeed; no lack of suitors—but these had since been rejected, or had died, or, more vaguely, “gone away,” and it had become evident, in these cases, that Cupid had not shot his arrow with proper respect for the ways of the world. The mother and daughter had continued their search.

Then Phanor Enday appeared. He had a solid and dependable quality about him that Mrs. Webster was quick to appreciate, and there was, moreover, an undesirable strain in his ancestry—or she thought there was—which argued for him, rather than against him, since it brought into prominence his own merits, in contrast to the excuses which must be made for his parents.

“Phanor Enday is the most brilliantly mediocre man that ever lived,” some one had once said to Mrs. Webster.

But this was clearly a mere attempt at saying something clever, and it wasn’t fair to Phanor, either.

He was dead set and determined to get ahead. His one idea was to get himself on the safe side of the gates of achievement and close the gates behind him, so that he should never have to worry about anything


again. This was a pleasant contrast to many of the young men of the day, who planned brilliant careers for themselves, and seemed to care for nothing if only they might die on the march, bravely fighting towards their goal.

He was the only man in his class at college who had not a full beard, and Isabel was attracted to him at once. He was always very gay and merry when he first fell in love, and Isabel liked him for it, though she had momentary suspicions that he was not, perhaps, properly serious-minded; as the arrangements wore on, however, he lost most of his joyousness, and she told her mother that she thought they might go ahead.

Accordingly, Cupid was told to shoot. He shot. Phanor was selected. Thereafter, the responsibility was Isabel's.

She had had a humiliatingly hard time getting him to ask her to marry him, but, in the end, she had succeeded in making him do it. The engagement was announced at once, to cut off Phanor's retreat, for he was not in a position to marry at once, and Mrs. Webster and Isabel were delighted. The match was reliable. Its superlative reliableness, they felt, would later serve as a monument to their discernment. The Websters had always been reliable people, and they sought no more, nor would take any less, for their only daughter Isabel.

Mr. Webster had taken no very active part in the match-making, since he saw that any interference on



his part would be superfluous. He thought Phanor a very good sort of boy, and he was sure that Isabel would make a good home for him. She was very like her mother, who had always been an excellent home maker. Phanor ought to consider himself very fortunate. He would have his work to think of, anyway.

Once or twice he had wandered into the parlor, which was given up to the lovers, and lent them an austere, vicarious sort of blessing, and on one occasion he had quite a long talk with Phanor alone.

Mr. Webster was a printer, and he felt that too many people considered his profession a mere trade; he had several pages of fine old type framed and hung up in various parts of the house, and he used them as texts for his theme whenever he caught any one who would listen to him.

"See that page of type hanging there on the wall?" he had asked Phanor.

Phanor had often seen it, and had wondered what it was doing there. It was printed in Dutch, and he didn't know any Dutch. But he got up and crossed the room obediently, when Mr. Webster told him to, and peered into the frame as if he were trying to see the wall behind it.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Mr. Webster asked.

"Um, murmured Phanor. "So clear!"

"Clear!" Mr. Webster exclaimed. "Look at that type. Look at that capital there. Look at the spacing and the margin and the make-up. Did you ever see anything like that in your life?"

"Why, no; I don't believe I ever did," Phanor said.

"I guess not! You don't see real artistic work like that, now-a-days. The art of printing has gone steadily down hill, ever since the very beginning." He glared at Phanor for a moment, and then added, with fierce emphasis, "If you want to know!"

"Yes, indeed," said poor Phanor.

He took the trouble, directly after this, to read up a little on the art of printing, so as to have something ready for the next interview. But before any further opportunity presented itself, Isabel reported that her father was frightening Phanor, and the interviews ceased. The two met alone only once again before the wedding, when Phanor called to ask "if it would be all right" for him to marry Isabel.

The Endays had come originally from Nantucket. Old Mr. Enday, Phanor's grandfather, had been a whaler, and had risen to be captain of a ship, in which he had made several very profitable voyages.

It seemed incredible that this old gentleman, whom Phanor remembered only as a fixture of the chimney corner, had ever done anything so definitely vigorous as to lower a boat at the cry of "Thar she blows!" and pull six miles to windward after whales. Phanor could hardly believe this; but then, it didn't matter. Life was a very different thing in his grandfather's day, and Phanor saw it differently. "Progress," he called it.

The old man had retired from the sea, at an ad-

vanced age, very rich, as riches were counted in those days. But the whale fishery was started on its final decline, and Mr. Enday saw that there could be no future in it for his son, even if Obadiah—for that was the boy's name—had shown a liking for it, which he did not. He had, therefore, old as he was, started a new venture, and set up in the marine hardware business. Perhaps he was in a field too foreign to his nature, perhaps his market wasn't right, perhaps his resentment at the failure of his old calling was not a sufficient motive to warrant success in the new; at any rate, the business was already tottering, when, at his death, he turned it over to his son.

Obadiah Enday saw it decrease until it was little more than a name, and he withdrew from it only in time to save a remnant of the family fortune. Thereafter, he employed his slender capital in half-a-hundred enterprises, in which he never risked enough, nor persevered enough, to win success.


He resolved that his son Phanor should branch out into a new line, and to that end sent him to college. It was an experiment. Phanor was the first of the family to receive such advantages. But so great was his feeling of responsibility, and so determined was he to retrieve "the fallen fortunes," as he said, that he seemed in a fair way to justify the experiment, and pay back, in coin or in kind, the money that had been risked on him. He worked hard, and took an engineering degree well up in his class. It was during his Junior year at college that he had found Isabel.

David Fleetwood, a class-mate of Phanor's, had left college without waiting to take his degree, to accept a position with the Wilton Thread and Novelty Yarn Mills. He had prospered, married, and settled down. Then, having time to look about him, he had run over his acquaintances in search of likely material for the business, and had at once, for the two were very good friends, hit upon Phanor.

In consequence, on David's recommendation, an offer of employment was put before Phanor, who, after long deliberation, "hastened to avail himself" of the opportunity. He resented the necessity of accepting the work before he knew whether or not he should like it, and as time went on, and he kept turning it over in his mind, he was further and further from being sure. As soon as he had posted the letter, he wished it back in his hands again; he liked nothing better than the state of not having made up his mind.

However, there was Isabel, who, though she knew enough not to actually clamor, still was obviously looking to him to do something about her, and might at any moment "get away." So, "everything considered," Phanor thought he had done the best thing, "under the circumstances." He had gone to Wilton, and had started work in the Mill immediately after his graduation.

His start was not brilliant. He began to learn the business from the bottom, as was then, and still is, the customary procedure for young men who feel so uncertain of their ability to go far and fast that they



must start below their natural level to achieve a sense of long and rapid progress. But he had too little imagination to be anything but diligent and devoted, and he had David to look out for him. The field was new to the Enday family, and any step in it looked like progress.

He felt that his father had escaped being a total failure only because he had had sense enough to drop his business when it got too hot to hold, and for some time he kept a watchful eye on the condition of the Mill, but it gave no sign of unsteadiness, and he began to see, with real satisfaction, that he was in a business that could not fail, or, what amounted to the same thing, could not fail because of him. So he bent over his desk, never made a move except for safety, and prospered rapidly. By the Autumn of the year 1873 he was in a good position, and was sure of his salary, which was eleven hundred dollars a year. He had, besides, more than seven hundred dollars in the bank.

He could see, then, no further real reason for delaying his marriage. He was a little lonely, and wanted a home of his own. Moreover, he thought that marriage would burn his bridges, for he was convinced that if he ever cut loose he would be a very devil of a fellow, which he did not in the least want to be. By being married, he saved himself the revelation that he could not possibly have been a devil of a fellow at all.

Isabel was delighted when he wrote her that she could name the day. "Naming the day" was a privi-

lege accorded her by tradition solely, for obviously she could not name a day too advanced for Phanor's financial circumstances, nor any day at all until he told her that she might, but she took full advantage of the traditional right, such as it was, when his letter came. He had drawn up that letter with the greatest care, as if it had been a contract, in which he must "protect himself," and the timidity of the phraseology almost implied a negative answer.

Isabel chose the first of December. But that was only two months off, and Phanor revised it. They "compromised," as he actually had the unconscious hardihood to say, on the first of January. He felt a little guilty at the thought of how he had put her off, but she talked so happily of the idea of starting the new year together, and began such eager preparations, that he felt all right about it again. The loveliness of her eagerness did not escape him, and he began to think that he was not good enough for her, nor any man good enough for any woman. Still . . . well, it might have been "more prudent" to have kept the matter open for a few more months.

He didn't really trust Isabel, in the bottom of his heart. There was no telling what she might make him do.

"Why, it's just this, Isabel," he had said to her. "I want to go to some small town, that's growing, and shows some progress and enterprise, and grow up with the community. A man's got to get established."

"You mean a place like Wilton?" Isabel asked.

"Well, Wilton, or some place like that. It don't have to be Wilton, specially, of course. I might find better opportunities somewhere else, of course."

"Of course, I want to do just the very best thing for your position, Phanor."

"Well, yes. But it's not just a matter of my position. A man's got to be respectable, and have some standing, you know. It don't do to be flighty."

"Oh, we're going to be the two happiest people in the whole world, dear! I've every confidence."

Phanor wasn't entirely reassured by this, but he couldn't see what more he could do to make his position secure. So long as he had his health, and Isabel didn't make him alter his ideas as to what was essential in life, he supposed he had no good reason to complain.

On the wedding day, Phanor kept out of sight as much as possible, while the guests were arriving, and no one had missed him, nor asked where he was. When Emily Enday came out of the bed-room, with her mouth full of pins, to say that Isabel was all ready, she found Phanor and David Fleetwood sitting together on a settle at the end of the upstairs hall. David was telling some of his very best stories, and Phanor was laughing heartily, with somewhat of his old delight in life. When Emily appeared, however, he seemed to remember, and his merriment left him.

He went and got Isabel, and they took up their sta-

tion at the head of the stairs, nervously awaiting the signal to go down.

Phanor had short legs, and a rather round body, which his Prince Albert emphasized, rather than concealed. One of his shoulders was considerably higher than the other, from long bending over his desk at college and in the Mill, but his wedding clothes had been made before this peculiarity evidenced itself, and gave him an uncouth, paralyzed appearance.

But then, he felt uncouth, down to the very bottom of his soul. His round face was glowing with excitement, and his dust-colored hair was stuck close to his head. His bristling stiff mustache was the only thing about him which seemed to be able to resist the subduing and flattening influence of the catastrophe. He was limp and faintly grotesque, and there was a hunted, miserable expression in his eyes.

Out of reluctant consideration for the fact that Isabel was almost as tall as he was, she had refrained from wearing high-heeled shoes.

Isabel looked calm, though this effect was achieved, perhaps, by an effort a little too obvious. She was sweet and pretty. Her brown eyes lacked the look of experience; indeed, every curve of her sensitive face and every line of her body showed a failure in everything but receptiveness. She was dressed more becomingly than she had ever been before; she seemed not to be Isabel Webster at all, but simply a pretty little suppressed woman waiting to be married. She kept tapping the floor with her foot and looking across

at Phanor, as she clung tight to his arm, as if to assure herself that he was not beginning to fade away before her eyes.

There were no unpleasant occurrences. The two clocks, one upstairs and the one down, had been correlated with split-second accuracy, which assured exactness, in the first place. Matilda Strong, who was at the piano, began the wedding march with a thunderous vigor that shook the house, and made certain that there would be no misunderstanding of that signal. On the tick of the clock she struck the first chord; at the first note of the fourth measure Phanor and Isabel started down the stairs, followed by Mr. Webster. Mr. Webster had been carefully trained, at rehearsals, in the task of walking so slowly; he justified the time spent on him, and kept time to the music without once overbalancing.

Nineteen steps from the foot of the stairs they halted before the minister; Phanor took a step to the right; Mr. Webster took two steps backward; the minister opened his book; the music stopped. It was perfect. Every one saw that things were going as they should, and felt easier in their minds.

The actual ceremony took eight minutes in the reading; that left twenty-two minutes for good wishes, hand-shakings, and kisses. At the stroke of four-thirty the bride and groom withdrew. Isabel's traveling dress had been put out on the bed precisely as it should be; the person who had been detailed to place the baggage checks in the lower right-hand pocket of

Phanor's waistcoat had placed them there. As they came down the stairs again the carriage drew up at the front door.

There were brief farewells. Isabel wept for a moment on her mother's shoulder, and received a blessing and a kiss from her father. They made their way down the steps, which were freezing again, watched by all the tearful nearest and dearest in the doorway, and at six minutes past five they were gone. And all this by people who had never operated a railway nor organized a coronation!

As they rumbled away over the icy hummocks in the stuffy padded carriage, Isabel put her hand in Phanor's, very simply, and enjoyed the sense of having all her life in view at once. She was Mrs. Phanor Enday. It seemed a very important thing. Although she had known for years exactly how happy she would be at this moment, and how definitely she would start to be the sort of wife she wanted to be, yet now she felt not so much happy, as bewildered by the importance of the occasion, not so sure of herself, as impressed with the difficulty of adapting herself to her part. She had heard the words which made her Mrs. Phanor Enday; yet, somehow, she was not being Mrs. Phanor Enday. She felt like Isabel Webster. Then she remembered that she did not have to solve this problem alone, or anything else ever again, and she began to look to Phanor to tell her what to do.

Phanor was tremendously relieved to have it over



with. He covered his real happiness, which he would not for the world have allowed to reveal itself, with an affectation of savage discontent at the weather. He was always made most irritable and disagreeable by any feeling of abnormality, and certainly being married to Isabel made him feel more abnormal than he had ever felt in his life. Gruffness seemed the easiest way out of it. God knew there were reasons enough! Here he was, to put it no more elaborately, a married man, and just as he was getting started!

"If I'd have known it was going to be like this," he said, "I'd have been in favor of waiting."

Isabel said nothing.

"If this old hack should fall to pieces," he went on, "we'd be in a pretty pickle! "

"I guess it won't," Isabel said.

"It looks liable, though. Ice everywhere! "

Isabel was silent.

The driver suddenly turned up a side street, to avoid a solid sheet of ice on which his horses had fallen, an hour before, when he was on his way to the house.

"Hey, there! " Phanor cried. "Where is he going? We want to go to the station! "

"He knows it, goosie! " Isabel said.

"I'm not so sure he knows it." Phanor leaned forward and rapped on the window. "Hey! You know we want to go to the station? "

"Yes, sir," said the driver, with an elaborate effect of boredom.

"There; you see? " said Isabel, with a quick side-long glance at Phanor.

"Well, I'm not going to make assumptions," Phanor said. "None of these fellows have any idea of where they're going." He reflected a moment. "We've got a train to catch, you know."

They rumbled on for a time, and at last turned down another street, and headed once more for the station.

"I'll bet the train will be late," Phanor growled. "I always said this was a rotten jay road. Ice and everything! "

Isabel said nothing.

"I'll have to go and see about the trunks. I hope they're there, that's all."

"How absurd, Phanor! " Isabel exclaimed. "You saw them put them in the wagon yourself, you know you did! With your very own eyes! "

"Well, that's not saying he's going to take them to the right place though, is it? He may think we want to go on the boat."

"Of course he don't think so! "

"Well, I hope he got it right, that's all. I can't afford to lose them."

Isabel said nothing.

"You go right on the train and see if there's any chance of getting a seat," Phanor went on. "I'll go up to the baggage car and see that they put them on all right."

It was evident that Isabel would take no responsi-

bility. What did she think, anyway? Leaving everything for him to worry about, of course.

"What's the matter?" he asked, suddenly. "Are you sick?"

Isabel squeezed his hand.

He reflected bitterly that she was only a woman. He didn't suppose he could expect anything else. Good Lord! What had become of everything? He had done for himself now! He had thought he knew which side his bread was buttered, and he had gone ahead and hung a millstone around his neck!

It wasn't enough that he should check the trunks; he was expected to see that they were put in the car. He would buy the tickets, yes; but was that the end of it? No, he would have to see that he got on the train himself, and find Isabel, and wonder if she had been able to find a seat; he would have to worry about getting there, and about every inch of the track, all the way to Wilton. Worry and fret and fuss about things; that was all he was good for!

The carriage finally got to the station, more by good luck than anything else; the train came in, by some freak of Chance; the baggage-men actually bungled into the act of getting the trunks aboard; the trainmen were unanimous in their opinion that this train was going to Wilton.

Phanor climbed on, discovered that he was in the smoker, backed out again, and got in farther down; he started down the aisle, looking anxiously from side to side for Isabel. He went through several cars with-

out finding her. Had she taken a wrong train? Had she been able to keep a seat? It was so simple a thing to do; there could be no excuse for not having done it.

At last he saw her. She half rose in her seat, smiling brightly at him over the heads of the people in front of her, waving her hand to attract his attention. Dear little Isabel!

He reached her side, and she moved over to make a place for him.

CHAPTER II

THE first business of the Endays, when they arrived in Wilton, was to settle down. That was what they came for. Indeed, it was what they lived for. If settling down, by some chance, had been denied . . . but this would have ended them, then and there, and there's no use discussing it.

For the first few days they went to a boarding house which Phanor had selected before he went away to be married; it was the best they could do, but they did not like it. They were not the sort of people to live at a boarding house. The other inmates were respectable enough; but Phanor and Isabel trusted no respectability but their own. The atmosphere of the place brought them down, and made them feel like other people—a feeling which they resented and hated, because it was so truthful. Phanor used to look back on those early days, when they had drifted far away into the past, and talk of the desperately hard and humiliating time he had had in getting started in life.

In consequence of all this, they were not long in finding a real place to live.

As they were on their way home from church, on their first Sunday in Wilton, they saw it; a little white house with a demure, old-fashioned manner, set far back from the street behind big trees.


"Oh!" Isabel exclaimed. "Isn't that perfectly dear!"

"It's bully," Phanor said.

The gable end of the house faced the street; it had a very steep roof, and the verge boards were ornamented with jig-saw work, like the icing on the cakes that one sometimes saw in caterer's show-windows. There were wooded wiggings, too, along the ridges of the roofs. In the peak of the gable there was a round-headed window, of which the blinds were open, and hanging on a nail from the rafters within was a derelict brass bird-cage, clearly visible from the street. The sight of this bird-cage, in some manner or other, made Phanor and Isabel sure that they must live in this little house. It seemed to cry out for them.

The principal entrance was at the side, under a porch—also jig-sawed out of all reason—and as they crept across the mossy boards to peek in at the door, they held tight to each other's hands, and struggled to keep back their delight. The dim interior aspect was forlorn enough, but it sent a thrill through them, and wrung their hearts.

A sign on the porch post asserted that the house was "For Sale or Rent," and gave the name of the man whom they should see about it. Isabel copied down the address, with a determined directness of manner that frightened Phanor. He would have liked to think it over until the house had been rented to some one else; then he could enjoy in safety his hopes for it, and the recital of all its advantages. He began at once to think



up arguments to prove that he could not possibly afford it, but Isabel was thinking only of getting in, somehow, by hook or by crook, and starting to live.

On Monday, though Phanor begrudged the time spent away from the Mill, they went to see the agent, and he took them over the house. Phanor detected a musty smell in the cellar, and said that the drains were not in good condition, but Isabel was sure she must have it, by hook or by crook, plumbing or no plumbing, and she gave the agent to understand that it would be all right. In two hours she had talked Phanor into it, though he said that the price was absurdly high, and asked her where she thought the money was coming from.

He worried over it, as soon as it was done, pointing out that he was only "reasonably sure," after all, of remaining in Wilton. He wanted to keep the illusion that he was likely, at any moment, to pull up stakes and go somewhere. However, he was dragged into it, and the door of the decision was slammed behind him. When all was said and done, in spite of the worry of it, a man must have a home.

In two weeks, by judicious picking in the stores, and by raids on the stocks of cast-offs in the garrets of the Websters and the Endays, they had accumulated enough furniture to fairly well fill the small rooms. At last they got rid of the painters and paper-hangers; Isabel went over everything in one more spasm of cleaning; Phanor cut the grass of the front lawn, and

they moved in. They were at home then, at 97 Elm Street. They stayed there for more than forty years.

Phanor wanted ceilings without cracks in them, an adequate furnace, a garden where he could dig and fuss, a piano for Isabel to play, a dressing gown and slippers, a double bed, a few books that he need not read—and a parlor.

He got all these things except the piano, and after a year and a half he got that; it was merely a symbol, for Isabel played only under compulsion, as a part of her wifely duties, and neither of them knew or cared the first thing about music.

Isabel wanted some pretty furniture, a bright sunny kitchen at the door of which the grocer's boy would call to receive her orders, a window which looked down the length of the garden, where she could sit with her sewing, planning for the future, a linen-closet—and a parlor.

The parlor had two broad windows looking out to Elm Street. The sun poured in, all day long, through the lace curtains; it was a bright and rather garish room when it was finished. But, to be accurate, it never was finished; it grew as they grew and changed as they changed, and always exemplified and indicated their life.


The wall-paper was light, ornamented with clusters of red roses, held by knots of ribbon in silver, which rubbed easily, and was visible only in certain lights.

The carpet was light also, and repeated the motif of the paper, except that the roses were larger, and there were small dogs and birds among them. This carpet fairly shouted for attention; it was the only thing visible on entering the room. The pattern had a tendency to make the head swim, especially when one was not looking directly at it, as was the case during ordinary conversation in the room.

In front of one of the windows stood a cast-iron table, heavily gilded, with a green marble top, and on it stood whichever of the plants at the time most needed the sun. Before the other window was a rubber-plant, towering almost to the ceiling.

Isabel had a little rubber bottle with a spray top, and she took great pleasure in spraying the leaves of the rubber-plant with a bug-killing concoction, standing on a chair brought from the kitchen to reach the topmost leaves. As she perched there she could see her slender pretty figure in its soft white dress, reflected in the mirror over the mantel, and she used to admire it, and sigh for Phanor's return from the Mill. Whenever she did this, she felt that she had been naughty, and would jump down and scurry away to the kitchen to forget about it.

Between the windows stood a library table with a red felt top, littered with various articles of use and ornament: an ivory paper-knife from Niagara Falls, a wrought brass bowl from Armenia, a pair of glass whale-oil lamps from Nantucket, and a copy of Martin Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," bound in white



leather. On the shelf underneath the table was a tray of visiting cards, and a big red and gold volume called "Glimpses of Famous Gardens."

In their courting days, they used to sit in the parlor at the Websters', side by side on the sofa, with their arms about each other and the big book open across their knees, looking at the pictures and dreaming of home and Gardens and the Wide World. Since they had come to Wilton, the book had never been opened.

Above the table hung a large picture, in a varnished oak frame, called "Alone." It represented a sorrowing young girl sitting in a row-boat among the rushes by the shore of a lake. The water was very still, the light was fading from the sky, and some lonely birds were flying home. The girl's head was raised with a pathetic, hopeful look, towards the horizon. The reflection on the glass made the engraving somewhat difficult to see, but when clearly seen, it bit into the soul of the beholder, and took away the sting of Death.

Against the side wall was a large sofa, upholstered in slippery hair-cloth. The piano, when it came, was a "square;" a vast, ungainly thing, like the monstrous offspring of a pair of degenerate tables; its ponderous lid was covered with a blue felt spread which Isabel had begun embroidering as soon as Phanor had promised her the piano, and at either end of it stood a terra-cotta jar of pampas-grass, tied into a bunch with a bow of green satin ribbon.

Scattered about the room were several chairs, with crocheted or tatted cushions on their backs; one was a

patent spring rocker, which snapped and creaked whenever any one sat in it, and walked across the floor, following the nap of the carpet, when it was rocked. The arms and back of this chair were ornamented with a pattern of incised lines in gold.

There was a white marble mantel-piece, the shelf of which was covered with a silken scarf with a fringe of puff-ball tassels. The shelf bore a gold clock, surmounted by a pair of reclining Cupids in crystal, and a set of Venetian glass tumblers. These things were wedding presents, the clock, which had not run after the first month, from Phanor's mother; the tumblers from Edward Pillsbury, who was in the glass-ware line. At each end of the hearth stood a jug of peacock feathers.


The mirror above the mantel was a fine old piece, also from Nantucket, and in its upper panel was a stiff, but forceful, portrait of the whaling bark "Rosy Dawn." To fit its position, the mirror really should have been placed horizontally, but this would have set the ship on end, and though the mirror's upright posture disturbed the composition of the ensemble, the location was the most conspicuous in the house, and was inevitable. The best things were in the parlor, and the rest of the house took what was left.

This is not a complete catalogue of the contents of the parlor, even at the beginning, when the Endays settled down, and many things were added, and some replaced, as the years went by; but it will serve to indicate the general tone of the room, and, at first, of

the whole house. Later, when Phanor's salary enabled them to gratify tastes which, had they been different people, they really would have had, the parlor was enriched to such an extent that it was no longer a reflection of the general tone of the house, but a conspicuous feature, like a painted iron stag on a lawn.

The rest of the house, indeed, was attractive enough; the sitting-room was really a pleasant, home-like place, since it did not try to express any attitude towards life. Use and custom had worn little nests and hollows in it—something which could never be true of the parlor. The closely-packed cushion of Phanor's chair, the frayed rug by Isabel's feet, the worn newspaper rack on the wall, the cleared working space among the piled magazines on the desk—these were the tracks which the Endays left behind them as they lived. They sank into the places which bore the imprint of their bodies and their characters, and were content.

The parlor was different. For one thing, it was an inspiration. They never sat in it except when there were visitors, when the stiff and formal air of the place made them feel unnatural and put them on their good behavior, but they loved it. It indicated that they were established; they were out of the reach of all trouble—all trouble, that is, which was not inherent in life. If ever they should be threatened by loss of Respectability, by lowered Tone, by hint of Failure, it was only necessary to point out to these



Tendencies the fact that there was a parlor, and the Tendencies would go away, and stop bothering.

The parlor showed them what they had done. They had created something that did not exist before, just as they had created a family out of two previously separate individuals. They climbed to the top of this their creation, and viewed the world. There were no two ways about it: a successful man had a better home than a man who was not successful, and the parlor was the measure of it. When they came to take an inventory for purposes of fire insurance, even Phanor was surprised to see how successful he had been. It made him proud and happy to see how much money he had been able to spend on this symbol of his prosperity; at the same time it made him cut down on expenditures for the rest of the house for a time.

Sometimes, it did not seem possible that Phanor Enday actually had a parlor. Why, it was only a few years since he had lived in a miserable little lamp-lit room at college, wondering how he was ever going to be able to provide even so much for himself; and only a few years more since he was a grubby little boy at home, who sat dreaming over his school books in the evening, listening to his father's complaints of the difficulty of living, and hoping desperately that some generous Deity would solve the problem of life for him, since he could never hope to solve it for himself.

David Fleetwood had a little better position in the Mill than Phanor, and his salary was bigger. David

was a little more of a success than Phanor. This gave him a potential advantage, but he was kind-hearted and good-natured, and made nothing of it. But Dolly Fleetwood, who was a rather bouncing person of entirely local intelligence, made everything possible of the situation, often in so vindictive a manner as to make Isabel's life a burden to her.

Dolly had been born in Wilton, and naturally knew all the best people—that is, the best of the Mill people, which was all that was possible. She took it upon herself to humble Isabel to a realization of her intruding inferiority, under the pretense of making her feel at home and comfortable among her new neighbors. Mrs. Fleetwood was not actually malicious, but there was a strong band of condescension in her spectrum. Isabel thought her horrid. But, of course, it would not do to quarrel.

So brave was Isabel in her resistance, and so carefully did she cover her real feelings, that the contest simmered down into a mere matter of rivalry in parlors.

The earthen-ware stand under Isabel's rubber-plant, for instance, was a challenge to Mrs. Fleetwood's simple wooden rack which David had knocked together for the purpose of keeping the moist clay pot from the carpet. Mrs. Fleetwood accepted the challenge, and her response was a squat table of burnt bamboo. This gave her an unquestioned advantage in stands, but since the table was higher than Isabel's earthen-ware support, it limited the size of the rubber-plant which

could be put upon it. Isabel pointed this out to Mrs. Fleetwood, who was unable to meet it squarely, and shifted her ground.

She bought a large glass aquarium, filled with sprawling water-plants and little ruined castles of cement for the gold-fish to swim about. This was a triumph, and Isabel, when she was called in to see it, felt crushed and miserable, but was unable to do more than admire the aquarium enthusiastically, which was something, of course, but not any real answer.


By this time the Endays had their piano, and this made up for a good many minor triumphs, but Isabel decided to make sure, and bought an ebonized music cabinet to match. Then she made Mrs. Fleetwood come in and look at it. Mrs. Fleetwood had no piano, and she could not pretend to any knowledge of music, and she was fairly caught. The best she could do was to say that she always dearly loved music, and intended, if ever she had a daughter, to get an organ like Professor Judd's, and have the child taught to play on it. But this was borrowing strength from a future generation, and did not count. After Mrs. Fleetwood had gone, Isabel played for two hours.

In consequence of this rivalry, which went on, with varying fortunes, for years, Isabel's pleasure in her parlor was augmented. She took great delight in spraying the leaves of her rubber-plant, cleaning the Venetian glass, or polishing the mirror of the "Rosy Dawn." These things were her very own; they had a sacredness. The most hideous banality, in a store, was

only that, and nothing more, but if it was brought home and put in the parlor, it became an intimate part of her life, with which the rest of the world had no business.

It was this same feeling of sacredness which prevented the Endays from keeping a servant, even long after they could have afforded one. They did not want a strange person around the house, making a ridiculous pretense of knowing something and trying to create the impression that they were somebody. In the course of time, naturally, the prosperity overbalanced the sacredness, and they took in a servant. It pleased Isabel to be able to speak of her maid, and this, in part, compensated for the assault on privacy, but it was long before she was completely accustomed to it. Her mother had never kept a servant. Certainly the Endays were coming on.

Every morning at a quarter to seven Phanor got out of bed, put on a dark brown dressing-gown over his pajamas, and went down stairs to start the day. He attended to the furnace, if it were winter, poked up the kitchen fire, and moved the tea-kettle to the front of the stove. Then he went to the front door to take in his paper; he enjoyed doing this; it pleased him to be thus visible for a moment, punctually every morning, at his own front door, taking in his paper. There was something so beautifully established about it. He paused for a moment, to take a deep breath, and imagined the neighbors saying, "There's Mr. Enday, taking in his paper."



When he came back upstairs to the bed-room, Isabel would be partly dressed, and so perfect and precise was the organization of the Enday household that she was always at the same stage of her dressing when he pushed open the door. If she should happen not to be, he asked if she were sick, and she hurried up. He kissed her, roughly to cover his shyness, and sent her off downstairs to get breakfast. The sound of the coffee-mill came rumbling up through the house just as he was tying his tie. It wasn't often he missed it. When he got downstairs again, breakfast was ready.

During breakfast, he read the paper. This was not because he did not care for her conversation, as he had explained to her, once and for all, at the beginning, but because he had no other chance to find out what was going on in Wilton and the rest of the world. From time to time he would find a head-line of interest, and he would read out to her how some banker, or real-estate man, had died, or that some one had been ruined in a financial failure. Isabel would want to know what the trouble had been, if it was a death, or in the case of a failure, if the women and children had been provided for. Sometimes these accounts of the troubles into which other people got themselves were so interesting, and kept them so long in discussion, that Phanor would actually have to hurry to get to the Mill on time.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Isabel would go to the parlor window and wave her hand to him as he turned the corner by the drug store. Phanor never


failed to look back. Then Isabel submerged herself in her housework again, and Phanor went on into the world of the Mill.

The Mill, built of gray granite, stood solidly beside the river, taking up all one side of Center Street for a third of its length. All day long the whirr and clatter of the spinners echoed from that vast cliff of dingy windows; at noon, when the whistle blew, and passers-by stopped to compare their watches, the sudden silence seemed like a stoppage of the revolution of the earth. The horse-cars stood in long lines before the main gate, and the throngs of workers poured out and scrambled on precisely like gaily colored marbles tipped from a box.

At night the windows gleamed darkly; the machinery was at last quiet, and the human part of the world, dressed up in obvious finery, emerged to promenade up and down before the brightly lighted windows of the shops. The robust girls walked arm-in-arm in rows across the sidewalk, bending double in occasional screams of laughter, looking back over their shoulders at the young men who stood in the store doorways, smiling and nodding after them.

Beyond the Mill, an area of side streets was filled with Mill-hands' houses; little boxes, all alike, painted white, standing in rows; there were two doors and four windows in the façade of every house, chimneys at each end, kitchen ells at the rear corners, and out-houses in the back-yards.

Opposite the main gate of the Mill, Arbor Avenue



ran out into the country. Along it stood the houses of the people who had nothing to do with the Mill; the Mill-people regarded them, as they regarded themselves, as of a different order of being. They were stuck-up aristocrats. The Mill-people were common toilers.

Off to the right of Arbor Avenue, a few quiet and tree-lined streets contained the houses of the better sort of Mill-people. The noise of the spinners never reached these dull and comfortable houses, and the people who lived in them found sanctuary from the dreary world—that is, the world of the Mill. By these pleasant streets, where the birds sang in Spring and the brown leaves fell in Autumn, the town measured its growing prosperity.

From the rolling hills all about, where the muddy roads wound down from the farms, the high gray walls of the Mill showed above the roofs and tree-tops, and the great chimney, with "W. T. & N. Y. Co.," done vertically in yellow bricks, sending up a great black plume of rolling smoke, proclaimed to Heaven that here men had gathered to make life real.

In this world Phanor was forced to work and exist; but he lived in Elm Street, to the right of Arbor Avenue. The world was filled with people, and he didn't like people. He wanted to be let alone.

When he came home for lunch, he was likely to be completely changed by the events of the morning, and at night, depending on what had happened during the afternoon, he would be changed again. Isabel kept

careful watch of this, and tried to treat him as he seemed to require.

All during the day, she was busy with her house-work, and enjoyed it. There were times when she found herself with nothing to do, but she was not a person susceptible to boredom, and she soon checked all tendencies towards despondency by the simple process of reflecting on her blessings and advantages. Now and again she was completely carried away by her sense of happiness, and she would run into the parlor to contemplate her radiant face and bright eyes in the mirror of the "Rosy Dawn," until she was compelled to execute a fantastic dance out through the house to the kitchen again, or upstairs to her sewing, from mere excess of spirit.

In the evening, they lived. There was nothing so fine, during the day, as coming home at night. Phanor talked about the men in the Mill, or the new furniture that they hoped to buy for the parlor, or the story that David Fleetwood had told him of the trusted and seemingly respectable man who had stolen some money, and Isabel would bring forward her news, and tell how she had been obliged to buy another dollar's worth of milk-tickets, or how she had forgotten to empty the pan under the ice-box, and had found a great puddle on the floor. If Phanor didn't feel like talking, he pretended to be worried about something, and stared at his paper in silence, while Isabel brought out some fancy-work or sat with a book before her and thought.

Rarely, some one came to see them, and then they

turned up the gas in the parlor, and tossed remarks back and forth, as if they were playing a game—each remark a challenge to think of something to say in reply. They almost never went out; Phanor didn't like to leave the house alone, and they were certain to be late, lose sleep, and break up the routine of the following day. He never made love to her, though sometimes he would come behind her chair and curve his palm under her chin, and sometimes he would catch her hands as she was going upstairs ahead of him in the dark.

All this seemed natural and right, and though they both sometimes wondered why life seemed to have so little in it, they never spoke of it. They knew the danger of expecting too much, and they had Phanor's success to be thankful for.

So things went on. But at the end of a year an event occurred which broke the continuity of life with suddenness and finality.

CHAPTER III

ONE cold and windy night in December, Phanor came home late from the Mill. He had sat at his desk long after the clerks had gone; the roar of the machinery had stopped; the clock was ticking noisily and eternally; his was the only light in the long range of frosty windows that stared out across the mill-pond. He was fussing with the new shipping order, turning over the printer's proofs, trying to imagine how the thing would work when it was done. It was wrong, but he couldn't mend it. Why the devil didn't printers write like human beings? At last he tossed the papers wearily up onto his desk, with the reflection that tomorrow was another day, got his hat and coat, turned out the light, and left.

At the door, the cold checked him. He turned up the collar of his coat, drove his hands deep into his pockets, and set out, thinking of home. The minutes occupied in walking home, at the end of the day, were among the pleasantest of Phanor's whole life. In his imagination, he need not be consistent, nor reasonable, as the Mill required him to be; he could just be himself, to stew over his worries, or reflect on his blessings, with no one to stop him.

Now, then, did he not, in fact, have the best and

happiest home a man ever had? To be sure, he had done nothing to deserve it—well, no; that was not being fair to himself. His drudgery at the Mill, solid and uncomplaining, was really faithful service, for which the Mill was rewarding him. “Years of Faithful Service”—that was the phrase people used when they presented loving-cups or engraved umbrellas to men who had spent their lives at desks. Well, he was getting on into years. Sometimes idlers and idealists said that the world was not always just in rewarding the faithful; Phanor, at any rate, had seen no evidences of any injustice. Let a man work hard and faithfully, giving “the best that was in him,” and the world saw to it that he had a safe home on windy nights.

Presently he would turn the corner by the drug store, and see the lights of home. The Lights of Home! How well the poets sometimes put things! They must have watched people going home, and noted their happiness.

What a good girl Isabel was, to be sure! Nothing showy, perhaps; just a good, common creature, blossoming out into perfection by becoming his wife. Bless her heart! The Lights of Home, and Isabel.

He rounded the corner, and started up Elm Street. The lights did not appear. He slowed down, and looked again. No light. Oh, yes, there . . . no, that was the Fleetwoods’ light; he knew that red lampshade. He walked faster, looking ahead against the keen wind with such intensity that his eyes filled with tears, and he was obliged to brush them away, theatri-

cally, with his hand. What could be the matter? Some tragedy? Was Isabel out, at this time of night?


As he came nearer, there was no room for further doubt; the whole front of the house was dark. What could have happened? Robbers? Was Isabel lost in the bitter night, wandering, cold and whimpering with fright, through the wind-swept drifts? Or was it worse even than that, and was she lying stiff and silent somewhere, and had she called his name before she died?

Oh, no . . . there was a light in the kitchen.

Isabel was at home, then. His bewilderment changed to rage when he saw how foolish he had been. What was the meaning of this darkness in the front hall? Did she think she could go ahead and break all the Rules, without thinking of him at all? Well, he would come stamping in, cold and weary, in his Own Home, and demand his rights. "What's the meaning of this?" he would ask. Then he'd see what she had to say for herself. He'd find out what it was all about. Trust him.

As he entered, he purposely tripped over the doormat, to emphasize the dangers of a darkened hall, and ran noisily against the newel post at the foot of the stairs.

The street lamp in front of the house shone in through the parlor windows and traced on the walls and floor the pattern of the lace curtains as delicately as if by tropical moonlight. The huge shadow of the rubber-plant, towering up, filled all one corner of the room.



"What the devil . . ." he began, and then stopped, so quieting was the effect of the fantastic shadows, and so great a hush of spirit seemed to emanate from Isabel, as she rose from where she had been sitting by the window. He was full of questions for her to answer, but she put herself at once into his arms, and he could not ask. She put up her mouth to be kissed, and Phanor kissed her, dumb with wonder.

"Phanor," she said. "I think we're going to have a child."

He started, and caught her wrists strongly in his hands, as if to force her to confess that it was not true. She nodded her head. He put his arm around her, for she seemed to want it, and stood waiting, without a thought in his mind. Her sudden dependence put him off his guard, and made him forget that he was standing in the parlor, still wearing his hat and overcoat.

"Isabel," he said, tenderly, and then, not knowing what else to add, "Little girl."

Isabel felt a little guilty at the needlessly dramatic manner in which she had chosen to make her announcement; she had been deeply moved at the conviction that her whole life, from thence forward, was to be completely altered, but, even so, she knew that if she should let her baby break into the daily routine, Phanor would never forgive her. She was entirely dependent on him now, and she realized the fact. Besides, simply for herself, she could not allow life to depart from its usual safe and satisfying channels.


Phanor's thoughts were more definite. That a trembling and timid woman should creep into his arms in the darkened room, and tell him the thing that Isabel had told him, was bad enough, but it was at its worst when he realized that this ridiculous moonlight trickery was associated with the most serious facts of life.

For he saw at once the seriousness of the situation. From now on, he would have not only a wife to support, but a baby. It meant an enormous increase of responsibility, and the whole burden of it fell on the one person who least wanted it, and could least support it.

He thought it over, as calmly as he could, and saw what it amounted to. He had come to grips with the Future—which was always disarranging his plans, anyway—and had virtually set his hand to a promissory note for ten thousand dollars, to be paid in instalments of six or eight hundred each year, for as many years as the child should be dependent on him—and God knew how much longer than that it might be!—all without the slightest security that the future would protect him in the event of any emergency.

He had thought of having children, of course—there was no harm in just thinking of it—but, Good Lord, he hadn't realized! He could not reconcile himself to the monstrous injustice of it. Life had played a trick on him.

He blamed Providence for it, readily enough, but Providence, somehow, seemed to shirk a share in the



consequences. Here he was, just nicely started, and then this had to happen!

There was one encouraging feature of the situation, he could blame Isabel. When they had discussed a child, as a possibility, she had responded, with shining eyes, in so tender and loving a manner as to make her approval seem almost a request. It was she who had gotten him in for it. It was true that she also had made outrageous demands on the future, which it would tax her to satisfy, but—well, what had that to do with it? He would try to be kind to her, he supposed; but she needn't think she had any right to his consideration.

"Well, I guess we're in a hole now, right enough," he said, one evening.

"Why, what makes you say a thing like that?"

"Good Lord, Isabel! If you can't see it, I can't explain it to you! I hope I don't lose my job, that's all."

"Lose your job! Why, what's happened to put an idea like that into your head?"

"Oh, nothing's happened. But there's going to be another mouth to feed before long, you want to remember. I hope I shall be able to meet my obligations."

"What nonsense, Phanor! Of course you will."

"That's easy to say. I hope the boy don't become dependent on Charity when he's older, that's all."

He enjoyed this sort of talk, knowing that it was himself who said it, and that it needn't be taken se-

riously. But when his Aunt Edna came to Wilton on a visit, and talked in the same manner, he was bitterly resentful. Why couldn't people let him alone?

"Ah! So there's a little stranger coming, is there?" Aunt Edna said.

Phanor scowled at her, disapprovingly—she was a gray, mousy person, insignificant to look at, but sharp as acid—and Isabel merely nodded meekly in confirmation.

"Well, I hope you know what you're about," Aunt Edna continued. "I'm sure I'd think twice before I went ahead and took any such responsibility. Bringing up a child, in these days, is something to think about!"

"Of course," Isabel said, "Phanor and I appreciate the responsibility."

"What do you know about it, child? Lands sakes! The precious soul! And left for Tom, Dick and Harry to bring up!"

"I guess we'll do as well with it as anybody," Phanor said, defiantly.

"Now, what makes you so cocksure? What experience have you ever had, I should like to know? Suppose the child begins to eat you out of house and home; what then, hey? Nothing but bills to pay, morning, noon and night. Oh, you'll see!"

"Phanor's position . . ." Isabel began.

"Yes; and supposing something happens to Phanor? What then? A private room in the hospital, like as not,

for weeks on end, while he's getting back his strength, and the doctors holding out their hands for the money. That'll be a drain on you, I guess. Hey? "

"We've no reason to suppose that'll happen, Aunt Edna," said Isabel.

"No, and the last person it happened to didn't have any reason for supposing it would happen, either! Well, all I can say is, I hope you know where the money's coming from. Only, if I was in your shoes, I'd have thought twice before I went and got all that expensive furniture and fixings for my parlor. What did you tell me you paid for that library table? "

"It was eighteen dollars," Isabel said.

"There; you see? Well, I hope the child don't become dependent on Charity when he's older, that's all."

Phanor didn't try to protest, nor to meet Aunt Edna's comment with argument; he took it out in wishing she'd get along home about her business. He hoped it was plain enough, now, that the whole thing was unnecessary. Lord, things like this didn't happen down at the Mill!

As time elapsed, he reached a state where the thought of his obligations had less power to irritate him, and he turned his mind to the problems of education and conduct. On this point, at least, he wouldn't be caught unprepared.

He knew how children should be brought up, for he had had the experience of being a child himself. From the vast jumble of ideas that swept in disorder through his mind, he evolved a general theory that the proper

course was to give his child all the advantages he himself had lacked. It did not, in fact, occur to him to give the child what he knew to be best, or what the child seemed by temperament and character to demand; he wanted only not to give it what was not best, and to take care that it should not demand what temperament and character ought not rightfully to demand.

When he considered the probable sex of the child, he found himself horribly embarrassed at the thought that he might perhaps have a daughter. He felt that he knew so little of women that he must inevitably fail to create a good one, or even, since he had only the vaguest notions of what went to make up a feminine nature, of creating a complete one. He hoped very much that his child would be a boy, or, if it had to be a girl, that Isabel would have the definitive share in its creation.

He was conscious of a lack of proper guidance in his youth; he had not been told what life meant to him. He intended to give his son the Key. The Key, that is, which he had never had. Though he knew that he should never have soared beyond the farthest stars, even with the most favoring instruction, still, he might have struck a higher mark if he had been released for flight in the proper manner.

He thought he knew the deficiencies of his own upbringing, which was nearly the same thing, in his mind, as knowing how to correct them, and he concluded that the responsibility for being a father resolved itself, in

the end, into a genius for correction, so that his son should be, under him, what he himself would have been had not his own father missed the essential idea.

His son would thank him for it, afterward. He had heard that phrase before; now he knew what it meant.

If the child were a girl—Oh, devil take it, what should he do with a girl! He tried to discover what happened to girls in the world, but he made no progress. It occurred to him that he might perhaps treat her as if she were a boy. He had heard of that sort of thing being done—in plays, mostly. It was reasonable, though. If he should try to make something of a girl, it would be only the same sort of thing, in a lesser degree, that he would make of a boy. When he tried to think out a plan for a girl's life, he could see nothing but a series of shameful and degrading contacts with things with which a girl had no business. If she should want to marry, it would be practically impossible to find a man good enough for her; there was not a man in his whole circle of acquaintance whom he did not know too well to trust in such a matter. However, the child would probably be a boy.

"It's quite a problem, isn't it?" he said to Isabel.

"I guess it is," she answered. "There's so many sides to it. I suppose we'll just have to feel our way along and do the best we can when the time comes."

"I don't like that way of going at these things," Phanor objected. "It's best to have a whole program thought out, and then you're not caught napping."

This was what Isabel hoped he would say. She found herself being crushed and warped and turned aside, at every step, by the relentlessness of life, and she didn't see how she was ever to get through with it unless Phanor had a program. Thank God she could count on Phanor.

Of course, Phanor had no more thought out a program than he had thought out anything else. He simply did a great deal of serious worrying.

When the time arrived for Isabel to begin making baby clothes, he saw that there was no escape. It seemed as if she might, out of consideration for his feelings, change her mind, and then there would be no baby after all. But as the days passed she showed no sign of changing her mind, and continued, in blind faith, to make baby clothes. She was committing herself, and him.

She had lined a basket with soft materials and dainty colors, ornamented with bows of ribbon, and as clothes, and other articles, were finished, she put them away in it to await the arrival of the owner.

Phanor would sit watching her at work, contemplating the basket in a reflective and dreamy manner, trying to imagine it occupied, and trying to guess the nature of the changes its occupancy would bring into their lives. Bad as it all was, there was something very sweet and moving in the way Isabel worked. Phanor felt bungling and stupid, and unworthy the gift of existence.

"This youngster," he said, suddenly, like one who had hesitated for a long time on the edge of speech. "Do you think it will be a boy? "

"I don't know," Isabel answered. "I suppose we can't tell. The doctor was telling me something about heart-beats, but I didn't understand a word of what he was saying. Would you like it to be a boy? "

"Oh, kind of," Phanor said. "I can't get used to the idea of a girl. How can you go ahead with the clothes and things, though, without knowing? "

"Babies are all alike for a little while," Isabel smiled tolerantly.

"I see." Phanor was abashed. "Well, maybe a girl some other time; but not this time."

He knew he was giving a false impression. He didn't want ever to have another child, unless, that is, the process of having this one should turn out to be easier than he expected, which didn't seem likely. But he didn't want to seem to be putting Isabel off.

"It's strange, isn't it? " he went on.

"It don't seem strange to me," Isabel said, soft-eyed, stopping her work.

"I suppose not." Phanor saw plainly that she was trying to make a fool of him. "Well, I hope it's a boy. There's more sense to a boy."

"There's sense to a girl, too; I guess I know that. But I'd like it to be a boy, too, if you want a boy."

Phanor scowled, and rattled his paper.

"Suppose he's sickly? " he said. "Lord, I hope not! "

Isabel shut her lips very tight, as if she wanted to prevent this thought from gaining entrance to her mind. She was a poor weak woman, and life frightened her at times; Phanor, who thought things out, had been all through fear, and had come out on the other side undaunted.

"Well, let's get a good doctor," Phanor went on. "I wonder if this fellow knows anything about his business."

"Everybody speaks very highly of him."

"Yes; well. Let's give the boy every chance we can. It don't happen often. Crickey, I hope he's a good husky youngster! A robust physique's a great thing; gives a man a start. He'll never get anywhere down at the Mill if he's got poor health to contend with. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to get one of those spring exercisers, like they have down at Hawley's, and have him do exercises in the morning, and at night, too, perhaps? I'm going to teach him to shoot; he ought to know how to handle a gun."

"You foolish goose! You talk as if he were a man already. What do you know about handling a gun? You didn't ever shoot. You'd have shot your silly brains."

"Humph!" said Phanor. "I guess not. That's just it; it's a good thing; makes a boy self-reliant; teaches him the value of life. If I'd had a gun when I was a boy I'd know more than I do."

"Too bad you didn't."

"What does a woman know of that sort of thing,

Isabel? The boy's got to be brought up to know how to take care of himself, hasn't he? I'm not going to have him pampered. You'd make a molly-coddle of him. That's ridiculous, Isabel."

"Well, of course, I don't want him to be a molly-coddle. But it seems to me you're making your plans pretty far ahead, when the baby isn't born yet. It might be a girl, too."

"I think it will be a boy," Phanor said, as if he were glad that they were making definite progress at last.

"Well, you can't tell. But you'd better wait till you see, I should think, before you go ahead and make a great coarse shooter out of him."

"Humph! I suppose so. Only, if he's a good husky youngster with red blood in him, I'm going to make him into a man with red blood in him, too. None of your Sissies for me! I was just speaking figuratively, of course. He don't have to have a gun, of course. Only it's a good thing for a boy to know how to handle a gun. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to get one of those little steel targets and set it up in the yard? Crickey, I'd enjoy that, too! I'm going to have great times with that boy of ours! "

Isabel finished the garment she was making, and put it away in the basket. This was out of her world. Phanor, of course, understood such things. She was being asked to let her baby go out into the world and be made gruff and rational . . . yet he would be a source of happiness to her, even then . . . coming

back into the world where he had been born, a generous, kindly man, fond of his silver-haired mother, and keeping his baby-love in his eyes. Yet here was a basket, barely two feet long . . .

"I'm through for to-night, Phanor. Let's go to bed early."

Phanor rose and started off about the house on the round of going-to-bed duties, thinking of his plan for a rifle range in the yard, where the neighbors would see old Enday and his son, making fine sport together, like the good fellows they were.

Isabel, too, in the weeks that followed, began to think of her baby as a boy. It may have had an influence; at any rate, the child that came to the Endays was a boy, with red blood in him, as the years were bound to show.

CHAPTER IV.

AMOS ENDAY was born on the seventh of July, 1875.

His parents called him "baby" as long as they dared, because they had a stubborn notion that he was no more than a sudden materialization of their marriage, changing to Amos—which was the name of his great-grandfather, who had been the whaling captain out of Nantucket—only when he began to show a tendency to become an actual person.

This tendency frightened them badly; to call the baby Amos, to see him grow to a recognition of himself as Amos, to find him, in the course of years, actually becoming a person named Amos Enday, filled them with apprehension. At times it seemed as if it would have been better not to have given him a name at all; that, surely, would have prevented his becoming anybody. People would ask, "And who are you, my little man?" and this materialization, this symbol, would pipe up and say, "I'm Amos Enday." It was preposterous. Why, they might have chosen a different name for him, and then where would this "Amos Enday" have been? If they had altered his name to 'Rastus, they would almost have expected him to change color during the night, and greet them as a pic-

caninny in the morning. They called him "son" for a time, and tried to fight it off by that road. But the fact remained: they had a personality on their hands.

However, there was no stopping it now; the boy was born, they had called him Amos, and he was being Amos. They braced themselves, and prepared for the worst.

Amos found himself, from the very first, in a world of wonder and glory. But he also found himself surrounded by dangers, and he fought against them. He used to speculate on the beginnings of his own individual life, feeling that if he could discover where he came from he might gain a vague idea of where he was meant to go.

He could see one trivial incident standing out through the fog of his early experience, and this he came to consider the dawn of his self-consciousness.

He could remember running around the parlor in a circle, carrying a small stick cross-wise in his mouth, like a horse's bit, and shouting the words "Ninety-five, ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, 'hundred," in what seemed to him to be thundering tones, in time to the beats of his foot-falls on the floor. This activity left in his mind an impression of grandeur. His resounding steps were stirring, like charging horses, or freight-cars; the stick in his mouth gave him an unhuman, machine-like feeling; the numbers from ninety-five to one hundred, which he had no doubt just learned from his patient mother, had a

mighty sound. He remembered the glorious unreality of it; it was like Roman Legions on the march. He remembered how his father had stopped his antics.

"Amos, quit that racket! You're not to run in the parlor; you'll break something. And a stick, too! Here, give me that stick. First thing you know you'll run it down your throat."

Amos stopped, gave up his stick, and saw the heroism fade out of life. He took up separately each assertion that Phanor had made: how did his feet wear out the carpet any faster than great Mrs. Fleetwood's feet, when she came to call? Father didn't put her out of the parlor. Why didn't he? What was he going to break? The piano? How could he run the stick down his throat if he held it cross-wise in his mouth?

He got an experimental stick from the wood-box, and putting the end of it against the roof of his mouth, tapped it gently with his hand. It would be terrible to be gouged in the mouth with a stick. If he had been holding it that way, he might, possibly, have run it down his throat; but not when he held it cross-wise between his teeth. He put it between his teeth and fell elaborately, to test his theory, and pinched his lip so painfully as he rolled on the carpet that he had to struggle to keep back a cry. But he was satisfied that it was an entirely different sort of injury from the one which his father had predicted.

He would have liked to argue the question, point by point, to see which was right. But he knew that his father would be "busy" which was the same thing as

being cross, and he would merely be scolded for talking nonsense.

Well, there it was; as soon as he found something splendid, it turned out that there was something the matter with it. He never thought of the incident without rage boiling up within him at having been so bullied out of an intellectually unassailable position.

A short time before Amos was born, Mrs. Fleetwood had told Isabel that she too was expecting a baby. This was rather disconcerting to Isabel, and the manner in which the announcement was made took away none of the spirit of emulation which it implied. It was a challenge. Isabel accepted it, since there was no other way, but she hoped very much that Mrs. Fleetwood's baby would not be a boy; then there would be an obvious difference, and the inevitable process of comparison would be more difficult.

Of course, in the face of the impending mystery, the two women could not wage war quite unregardful, as if the having of babies was no more than the adding of ornaments to the parlor; they really achieved a feeling of sister-hood which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary relations, and spent long hours in talk together, like girls with dolls. Neither of them knew exactly what she was doing, and the fact of their common reliance on Nature brought them together as nothing else had ever done before, or ever did again.

As for the fathers, they were proud and delighted at the idea of having children, and let it go at that.

But on the subject of the coming financial burdens they opened their hearts to each other with passionate abandon.

But Mrs. Fleetwood's baby was a boy also—"by chance," as Isabel said—and the battle began again in the field of training and education.

Naturally Amos did not know of these competitive relations between his mother and Mrs. Fleetwood. Dick occurred in Amos' life like a natural and unpremeditated fact; Dick simply was there. For Dick, Amos was there, also. Though Mrs. Fleetwood succeeded in making a rather chesty young man of Dick, the two got on well together until they were separated by the progress of events.

Once Amos mentioned at home that he thought Dick had a nicer mother than he had himself.

"Why, Amos!" cried Isabel, very much shocked. "How can you say such a terrible thing as that? What gave you that idea, I should like to know?"

He managed to convey the idea that he had noticed a certain lack of restraint between himself and Isabel which did not obtain between Dolly Fleetwood and Dick. Isabel was angry at this, and took it out on Amos, telling him that he ought to be ashamed of himself for not knowing that no one on earth ever had a better mother than his own. Amos saw that it was natural and right for parents to boast of their goodness, and call upon God to witness that no one surpassed them.

He began to suspect that perhaps Mrs. Fleetwood

was on her good behaviour when he was present since she couldn't help regarding him as an ambassador and a spy from Isabel.

He took Dick into confidence on this point, and asked for particulars. He had noticed, on the occasions when Dick came to his house to play, that Isabel was exceedingly polite to Dick when the time came to send him home, but that as soon as he was gone she was very curt and business-like about putting away the toys; in like manner, Dick said that Dolly was a model of courtesy in shooing Amos out of her house, but that she swept up the steamships and railroad yards like an avenging cyclone when he had gone.

When he got home that night he watched his mother carefully for a long time, and decided that she was right about being the best mother a boy ever had, for he liked her better than any one else in the world, even unrestrained as she was.

Amos had once been given a book which described the play-room of a little girl who lived in England; it was a room made especially for her, and had a frieze of lovely animals, following one another endlessly around the walls; it contained the pictures that she liked best, selected by herself in the shops; her favorite books were in the corner, in her own book-case; it was specifically mentioned that she might, if she wished, draw pictures on the floor with chalk. To Amos, this sounded like a fairy-tale of the most improbable sort. He played on the floor of his mother's sewing-room;

the wall-paper had a stupid border of armorial bearings; the pictures were stuffy and unreal, meaning nothing; his books were kept downstairs in the general family book-case; the floor was carpeted, and he could not even "litter" it. He used to wonder what it would be like to leave one's toys out on the floor, in their proper places, over night, or, when one felt in the mood, to look at a picture one liked.

He supposed that these things were true for the little English girl because she was in a book. He liked her, in the book, because of her room, and because of the fact that her stockings were always carefully pulled up—a virtue which he could not himself achieve—and he resolved to marry her, if ever he should catch her out in real life.

But real life, even, seemed to be different, for her. She used to look from her window into a sort of street that was called a "crescent." There were no Crescents in Wilton. She took delight in gardens, and in visits to the sea; she had a nurse and a governess and a pony-chaise, and she used sometimes to get the gardener to let her look at the bees. "The" bees—as if bees were a matter of course. There was a haunting and sweet strangeness about it all.

Or was it he himself who was different? Certainly, if that were true, it was a disadvantage; he was plainly below the level of normal happiness. Yet the Fleetwoods—for example—didn't have any bees, and they never went to the sea. The sea. What was it, really? His mother had told him that his great-grand-

father for whom he was named, had been to sea. But that was long ago, and his great-grandfather was now dead. Had everything happened long ago? Or was it still going on—somewhere?

In the quest for the reality of happiness, he used to get what he could from the parlor. It was the very best thing in the Endays' life, and where else was he to look?

The red jardinière made a sound like a temple bell when he tapped it with his knuckles, and the rubber-plant that sprouted from it could be used as a tropical jungle where cannibals lived and where hunters made monkey's throw cocoanuts at them. The dim space under the table could be made to echo with the roars of tigers; the parlor table was better than other tables in the house for such purposes, because it had a forbidden, secluded atmosphere, like a real forest. But it mussed his blouse to crawl into the forest. The carved lines on the back of the patent-rocker were entertaining, because he could begin on one side and follow through with his thumb nail all the intricacies of the pattern until he came out on the other side, having gone through every line and not using any line more than once. There was something mysterious about this. But to reach the top of the chair-back he had to kneel in the seat, and that was bad for the springs. The peacock feathers could be taken out of the jars to be admired and dreamed over, and he found that they were not difficult to balance on his nose.

But there was always the danger that he would stagger into something and break it. The piano had keys made of elephant's teeth, grown yellow "because he had no mother to make him brush them;" Amos used to strike the lower notes reverently, thinking sadly of the little orphan elephant, who had given up his teeth, and was now wondering, perhaps, where they were. But the sound of the notes was likely to be annoying to people who were "busy."

The picture called "Alone" was one of the most beautiful things in the world. It was lovely and sad. Amos never discovered what it meant, but it filled him with emotion. He used often to climb on a chair to be near the lonely girl; he alternated between a feeling of gratitude that he was not thus alone, as night was coming on, with only one oar, in the middle of a swamp, and a wish that he might be in exactly that forlorn position, and be so beautiful and so melancholy. He would think of her when he was lonely in bed; she knew that he was there, and he knew that she was in the parlor in her boat, and that made things seem easier.

But he could not always take away with him the imagination of the parlor. There was too great a contrast between the parlor and the world.

If he could make the parlor come true! If only he could get his hands on the . . . on the . . . on what the parlor represented . . . on what the parlor should have represented. If only . . .

But the parlor was surrounded by a fence of pro-

hibitions. All the interesting things were labeled "Do not touch." The parlor door was open, sometimes, to the body, but it was never open to the spirit. It was fine and wonderful, but it was not for such as Amos.

"Amos!" said his mother. "How many times must I tell you that you're not to lie on the floor in the parlor? Look how you've mussed up your clean blouse!"

"What are you up to now, Amos?" This was Phanor speaking. "You're not to climb in that chair; you'll break the springs. Now mind what I say."

"When you're older, Amos, and can behave like a gentleman, I've no objection to your sitting in the parlor as much as you like."

"Well, I should think that was a fine place to play with trains! In the parlor!"

When Phanor said, "First thing you know you'll have that rubber-plant over onto the floor," it was a sign that Amos was invoking the spirit of the jungle.

Naturally enough, he banished the parlor from his affections as soon as he could afford to do so.

The evening was the best part of the day. When Phanor came home from the Mill, Amos went to meet him in the hall. Phanor was usually glad to get home, and that, in itself, seemed to brighten things up. Sometimes, too, he had presents in his pockets; a bag of lemon drops, or a ball, which "must not be thrown in the house," or some thread bobbins from the Mill. The bobbins were of varying sizes; the larger ones made good locomotive wheels or lumber trucks, and

the smaller ones were useful as kegs of nails, drums, or mortar-tubs. Phanor always handed them out rather contemptuously.

After he had emptied his pockets, Phanor changed his clothes, to emphasize the difference between Home and the Mill, and then they had supper. Supper was a pleasant meal, because they were all together at it, in a more real sense than at breakfast or lunch, and because it was a prelude to the delightful evening of reading that was to come.

As soon as the supper dishes were cleared away, Isabel read to Amos from the book which he had selected while she had still been busy in the kitchen. The land of wonderful things was reached again through books, and Amos would sit at his mother's feet, his chin on his hands, listening and dreaming, and wondering how the books could manage to know such delightful people and places.

What an extraordinary thing it was that there should be a charcoal-burner, who lived in a wood and had a beautiful daughter! How wonderful that there should be a gentleman from Ceylon who lived across the street! Where were the vast ranges of snow-capped mountains, the great rivers, the philosophers and the poets and the ruined castles, the bells that rang for Dick Whittington, and the people who never seemed to have to think of bed-time?

He used often to interrupt when things were not sufficiently clear, and he absorbed the explanations that were given him as eagerly as he absorbed the

story itself, but it never entered his mind to attempt to put into words the main question: how could it be true that there should be two worlds, one filled with romance and wonder, and the other hard and literal and common-place, and that both these worlds should be true?

To be sure, one of the worlds was in books. But the books always told exactly where things happened. It was in London, or in the country, or somewhere—somewhere else. What was the trouble? Alice had solved the problem by going down the rabbit-hole and through the looking-glass. But that was not a true story. There were so many things, and the days were going by, and he was missing them!

He had asked his father and mother to help him explain the paradox, but they never had any answer ready at the time, and later, when they had thought up something to tell him, he seemed to have forgotten about it. Moreover, they were eager to put it out of their minds as soon as he would let them, for it was simply another annoying manifestation that there were now three Endays living at 97 Elm Street, instead of two. After all they had done to prevent it—hopes and prayers and steady resistance—here was Amos Enday, going his own way!

“I don’t know what’s got into that boy,” Phanor said to Isabel, one night after Amos had gone to bed. “He sits and thinks so much.”

"I know," Isabel answered. "I wonder what he thinks about? "

"It's beyond me. I caught him at it to-night, and I said 'A penny for your thoughts,' and what do you suppose he asked me? "

"I don't know. What? "

"Well, he said, 'Where do people that write books live? ' Did you ever hear of such an idiotic question? "

"I wonder what made him ask that? What did you tell him? "

"I said they lived up in trees, at first. And you ought to see the way his eyes stuck out! Then I saw he was serious, and I told him they lived in houses, same as other people. And then he said, 'What houses? ' Of all the fool questions! "

"Well, you know how boys are," Isabel said.

"Yes, but . . . I don't know. I wonder if he'll ever amount to anything, when he grows up? "

Isabel smiled in a far-away manner.

"He will, of course," she said. "But it seems such a long road! "

"How does Amos get on with his lessons? " Phanor asked suddenly, one evening.

"Oh, good enough. He's not a dull boy. But I think he ought to be going to school in the fall."

"Oh, Lord! More trouble! I haven't got any confidence in that MacReady woman, I tell you that much."

"Everybody speaks very highly of her, though."

"Sap-head!" said Phanor.

"Well, of course, Dolly's going to send Dick to Waverly."

"Good idea. I'll bet they know something, down there."

"It's not in our ward, you know; it'll cost extra."

"What's the cost got to do with it when the boy's whole future's at stake, Isabel?" Then Phanor thought for a moment. "I suppose Miss MacReady knows as much as any of them though, at that."

"How you talk! What have you got against Miss MacReady, I should like to know?"

"She's a sap-head. The whole lot of them are sap-heads."

"Why, Phanor! She keeps a good school; everybody says that. The children are nice children. Oh, I saw three of the cunningest little tots go by the house to-day! They had their books done up in straps. They live over the bridge; I see them nearly every day. And the water was running down the gutter and they stopped to watch a stick go down and they laid their books right down smack in the mud."

"Dirty little Micks!" said Phanor.

"I went out and spoke to them. 'For shame,' I said. 'To put your nice books down in the mud like that!'"

"What did they say?"

"They ran."

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Phanor pondered a moment, wondering why people couldn't have some consideration for other people's feelings.

"Well," he said. "I hate to have a boy of mine go out in the street and play with the dirty Micks. It seems a shame. The boy's so sensitive to influences. But I suppose there's no way out of it."

"Then do you think he ought to go to school in the fall?"

"What do you ask me for? It's you that's got the boy's bringing-up in charge, not me."

"What an idea! Your own boy!"

"What do you want to keep running to me for? I don't know what conditions he's going to meet, do I?"

"Well, I'm glad we kept him home as long as we did; I think he'll get ahead faster, now. But he's over nine; I think he ought to go in the fall."

"And play with dirty Micks in the street? No, thanks!"

"Well, what do you want him to do?"

"Do? Do? There you go again!"

"I should think you'd take some interest, Phanor."

"That's ridiculous, Isabel! Just because I don't want to have the boy made a hoodlum of, you say I don't take any interest. I didn't say I thought he ought to go to school, did I? I just suggested that he asked a lot of fool questions. And you try to make out I want to chase him out of the house."

In short, it was decided to send Amos to school in the fall.

The day came when the matter was brought to the attention of Amos himself. Isabel asked him what he would think of putting away his toys and going to school like other boys. He was delighted with the idea, and accepted it with enthusiasm, though he didn't quite like to put away his toys. Still, it would mean that he was grown up, and that would be worth everything.

But as the day drew nearer, and became, from a vague "some day," to "some day next week," and finally to "to-morrow," he felt his courage slip away from him. It was a terribly important thing to be grown up; he had no faith in his ability to act the part. It was evident that it would make him over into an entirely different sort of person, and, in his heart, he was not sure that he could stand being different. At least, not just yet. These things always came upon one when one was so desperately unprepared for them!

On the great morning, which arrived inexorably, in spite of his prayers for delay, he was hustled through an unusually punctual breakfast, and dressed in his best clothes—new corduroy trousers, a fresh white blouse with a broad stiff collar and a flowing red tie. As his mother knelt on the floor before him to give the final brush to his yellow curls, he noticed that she looked grave, which she wouldn't have done, he reasoned, unless there had been some basis for his own apprehension. She did not seem to be able to help him out of the pit of fear into which he was slipping. He did not know, of course, how frightened she was.

He made a last stand.

"Mother," he said. "Couldn't I just go on being your little boy? "

Isabel smiled tenderly and patted his shoulder.

"You'll be mother's little boy just the same, darling."

Somewhat comforted by that, but trembling and on the edge of tears, he took her hand, and they set out.

CHAPTER VI

THE school-house was a dingy brick building about ten blocks from home, set on the very edge of town, at the end of Arbor Avenue, in a district where vacant lots and curbless streets were struggling for supremacy with cheap yellow tenements in the first rawness of their youth. It was a region new to Amos, and it filled him with horror; the tenements seemed unreal and terrible, because none of the people he knew lived in such houses, and the forlorn and muddy streets seemed pitiful lonely and unprotected.

But he forgot his terror in contemplation of the school-house itself. It stood bleakly alone in the waste, a cheap candy-store across the road from it, a brown wooden chapel on the corner near it; these buildings constituted a group, huddled together as if for mutual protection, in a primeval world. It was hard to realize that the school-house was the center of the knowledge of all the Universe. In fact, passing strangers had several times mistaken it for an Insane Asylum.

He held tight to his mother's hand as they crossed the play-ground. As he looked at the boys and girls, he was fascinated by the thought that they were school-children, that they *knew*. They watched him with curiosity as he passed; he thought he saw contempt in their eyes, and a challenge.

He was taken into a dim office, which smelled of chalk-dust, and introduced to Miss MacReady, the Principal, a hard, grim woman, who was poor in spirit, and resented it.

"I hope you're going to be a good boy," she said, putting her large firm hand under his chin.

He nodded his head free of her grip, wondering why she thought there was a possibility that he would not be a good boy.

"I hope you'll learn a great deal," Miss MacReady continued.

He was very much interested in all the arrangements. Everything was different, and strange. When the principal spoke to him, he had just noticed that the walls of the room were entirely surrounded with blackboards, so that her remark seemed like an interruption; he was wondering if these blackboards were the school equivalent of the floor in the little English girl's room, on which she could draw with chalk.

Then the bell rang, and the children came trooping noisily in; the Principal and Isabel and Amos set out down a long corridor, passing the doors of school-rooms. On the walls of the corridor were pictures; he noticed a portrait of George Washington, and a picture of a lion in a cage—the cage was made of slats of wood, screwed to the frame of the picture—and a scene representing some women in filmy clothes, dancing under trees. Later he found that none of the children ever looked at them, and he never did so himself.

He was presented to Miss Whittier, who also made

some remark about being good, and then he was left by Miss MacReady and his mother—who gave him a farewell smile to which he was too miserable to respond—at an inky little desk in Grade Two, behind a girl with yellow pigtails, who kept turning around to look at him. His mother had gone. He supposed that all the other children had come alone when they had first begun school, and it amazed him to think of their fortitude. He would never be able to manage things like that.

He learned that the girl in front of him was named Harriet. Miss Whittier seemed kind, and took an interest in making him feel comfortable and at home. She announced to the room in general that he was Amos, a new boy, whom she hoped they would like, and they all turned and stared at him, nearly killing him with embarrassment. He wondered if he could ever hope to be like other people.

There was some talk of addition and subtraction, and vague hints with respect to knowledge of peninsulas and rivers, but in these activities Amos had no part. He sat at his desk at "position," with his hands folded before him, and listened. He had been prepared to put his trust in school, and school seemed unwilling to accept him. He was out of it forever.

When whispering recess came, it was worse. The buzz of conversation did not include him. Miss Whittier raised the window to expectorate; he watched her in a dreadful fascination. Noticing his look, and seeming to resent it, she suggested to the class that the new

boy was lonely, and that it would be nice if some of the other boys would speak to him. Amos smiled gratefully at her.

The boy across the aisle moved into Amos' seat, announced that his name was Bert, and suggested that they make spit-balls.

"Make 'em small," he said. "We'll put 'em in our pencil-boxes, to keep. They get hard. I got a nair-gun."

Amos chewed paper eagerly, and made spit-balls. When Miss Whittier wasn't looking, Bert flipped one across the room, and Amos, in plain sight, was about to follow his example, when Bert stopped him, and said that you weren't supposed to throw spit-balls.

"I got my pencil-box full," he said. "She'd be mad. Let's get yours full. You got a good 'raser. Gimme it?"

Amos nodded. "You can have it," he said.

The windows were opened wide, and they all stood up and did exercises. Amos managed fairly well to keep in time with the rest, and wondered what connection this activity would ultimately be revealed to have with the process of knowing all about everything.

Then whispering recess was over, and Bert moved back to his own seat, taking with him Amos' new eraser, which his mother had given him. This made him very unhappy. Still, it had bought him Bert's friendship. He had managed to get himself included in the school. He sat again at "position," thinking

that Bert was the finest person he had met in the whole outside world.

The session closed with singing. Amos found the place in the book, though he could not make out the words at the speed with which they were sung. He sat listening to the shrill chorus. This was fine. They sang of the loveliest things in the world; a song which asserted:

“The summer time is coming,
The Spring is on the wane . . .”

a sentiment which filled Amos almost to bursting with a cloudy idea of the beauty of life. How lovely! “The Spring is on the wane!” This was fine.

But it had to end. They all stood up, did the “I pledged allegiance to my flag,” the doors were opened by Tony, the boy who sat in the corner seat, and the room full marched out, two by two, to the coat-racks in the hall.

Amos saw that he was going to learn all about everything. This, he thought, was what he had been waiting for. It might have been better, to be sure, if he had been put in touch with it sooner. But he was in touch with it now. He had found the Great World.

He was through, now, with Home. Now came school. His loyalty was divided; he now had two preceptors, instead of one. They taught him different things, and, since he couldn't make up his mind which

of them to trust, he spent six lonely years in deciding to distrust them both. He was heart-broken at the thought of turning away from any one or anything that would accept his affection, but there seemed no help for it.

Well, if it had to be hard, let it be hard. They would find that he could go through with it, in spite of everything.

He ran home as fast as he could go, thinking how delighted his mother would be when he told her. They would talk it over together, and get things straight to start. They would get things straight, and then . . . !

He came bursting into the house by the front door, calling for his mother. She answered from the kitchen. For a second he stood silent. How should he begin? It was so tremendously important to begin at the proper place, and he knew so little how to select the proper place. If he could get this first gesture to come right now, at this supremely important moment, then the whole of life would be solved.

He arrived in the kitchen.

"Mother," he said. "Miss Whittier spits out the window."

Isabel was obviously surprised.

"Oh, no, I guess not," she said.

"Yes, she does, too," Amos insisted. "In whispering recess. I saw her. It's three minutes. She put up the window like this . . ." He began to illustrate.

Isabel thought best to forget her incredulity.

"Have you been a good boy?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Mother's little school-boy," Isabel said.

Amos stared back at her. What had gone wrong?

"Did you forget your cap?"

"It's on," said Amos, putting up his hands to his head.

"Yes; well, take it off in the house, my son. Run upstairs and change your clothes. Mother's put everything out on the bed. Fold the things neatly, remember."

Amos wandered off upstairs and took off his best clothes.

Here was bad news, to be sure. There had been some mistake. It had all been so wonderful, so filled with promise . . . but you couldn't get around the Conspiracy. People just wouldn't tell.

He went down to the parlor, and pushed himself back into a deep corner of the sofa. It couldn't be that he was the only one who saw things to be explained. No; it was just that they would not tell. Why, they would not even confirm his suspicion that there was something to tell about! Some vast, all-including Something, the understanding of which would make all plain. You couldn't get around the Conspiracy.

They had all seemed to know about it, there at school. They had sung a song about "the Spring is on the wane." He didn't know what that meant, but all the rest did. He tried to sing it, although the tune had

entirely escaped his memory—Oh, it was pitiful! So great and glorious an idea, so close to the heart of the matter, and he could come no nearer to it than this vague meaningless wail! And he had given away his new eraser!

When Isabel came to find him, he was on the edge of tears.

“What’s the matter, little man?” she asked. “Something gone wrong?”

“Nothing,” Amos sobbed.

“Try and tell mother all about it.”

Well, perhaps he could trust her after all these years; perhaps it was not too much to hope that he could begin again. Before that thought, his tears vanished.

“We did ‘I pledgallegiance tomy flag’ in school,” he said. “When the boy opens the doors, and it’s over, we all stand up, like this, and we go like that, and we say ‘I pledgallegiance’ and go get our hats. Bert’s got a nair-gun.”

“Who’s Bert?”

“Boy by the name of Bert,” Amos explained. “What does it mean, ‘I pledgallegiance’?”

Isabel rose and gave the salute. “I pledge allegiance to my flag, and the Republic for which it stands . . .”

“Yes!” cried Amos excitedly. “We did like that! What’s it for?”

“It means the United States,” Isabel said.

She knew, all the time!

"We sang a song about the Spring is on the wane," he went on. "What does it mean?"

"I'm afraid I don't know that song," Isabel said. "How does it go?"

Amos began his dreary chant, and Isabel was forced to interrupt.

"Well, Mother's got to go get supper now."

Amos followed out to the kitchen, and took his seat by the window, asking questions, to which Isabel flung replies. She wasn't trying to answer anything, but only to return each shot. He struggled on for a time, but at last gave up.

He had a revival of hope when he heard his father's step in the hall. Phanor wasn't likely to be communicative, but some hints might fall.

"Hello," said Phanor. "Been to school, hey?"

"Yes, sir," said Amos.

"Well, what did you learn to-day?"

What had he learned! Here was a question! It seemed that the best reply would be "Everything," and yet that seemed far from the truth, too. He cast about in his mind for something that should be an adequate symbol of his achievements, but he had to hurry, because Phanor was nearly out of his coat and was taking the newspaper from his pocket, and the time was short.

"We learned about a istum," he said.

"A what?"

"A istum," Amos repeated. "It's a narrow land with water."

"Oh, I guess you mean an isthmus."

"Yes, sir; an Is Must. Where is one? " He had an idea that he might go out after supper and look at one. It couldn't be true that geography, too, was all somewhere else.

"Well, Siam's one," Phanor said.

"What's Siam? "

"It's an isthmus, young feller," said Phanor, and unfolded his paper.

During supper Amos was silent. The worst of it was that he had no real grievance. All his questions had been answered. He had been able to call for answers; it was explanations that he couldn't get. They must see what he wanted. Well, he would find out from some one; Bert, perhaps. And school had just begun.

He was sent to bed early, "so as to have a clear head for school." That must mean that he was to find the explanation for himself, and that he might expect it to come from school. Well, then.

He dropped off to sleep with somewhat the same feeling that Columbus must have had when he went to sleep on the night of the third of August, 1492.

School was rather too well organized. Being good appeared to mean obeying the rules, and the rules, almost without exception, were stupid—they were mere obstacles. When he found that there was a fairly large group of boys whose aim in life was to break the rules, and that this group included all the boys

whose respect he cared for, and who had won his own respect, he allied himself in thought and action with the party which so well expressed his resentment.

He admired these boys because they were acting as he felt. They were against the Conspiracy.

He soon came to see that there was no need to try to keep out of the way of trouble, for the world was full of it, and the sooner he learned to face it and get through with it, the better.


The chief trouble, in those early school-days, was that caused by going to school cross-lots.

It was strictly forbidden, because the lots were filled with roving bands of Micks. But Amos knew the Micks as friends. His father and mother did not seem to grasp the adequacy of this reason—as they saw it, he couldn't possibly know and like the Micks, who were not real boys, but attributes; symbols of wickedness, evil associations, and God knows what.

Time after time he was called into the parlor to be scolded. One after another the arguments against the lots and the Micks were brought out; patiently, or impatiently, the moral was pointed. Amos was as obstinately opposed to this reasoning as his parents were obstinately in agreement with it.

For who will deny life because of arguments?

In summer the lots were green and lovely—expanses of waving meadow and brown marsh lands, with swallows and flowers and soft winds—and in that divinity he felt himself divinely included. "The Spring is on the wane;" that was what it meant; the sunlight was



on the lots. From such a feeling, could he be turned aside because of arguments?

In Winter the lots were a dreary waste—brown stubble and patches of snow, forlorn hay-ricks standing in solemn desolation—and Nature, shut up to sleep for the Winter, waiting for Spring to touch the wane again, was outside and beyond him, and he felt complete in himself. Was it to be expected that precepts would cloud such a vision?

Across the lots ran a small river, a coffee-colored stream that wandered sedately from somewhere to somewhere. By the respectable route to school, the river was crossed by the Arbor Avenue Bridge, but to go to school cross-lots, another bridge was used—a shaky structure of clattering planks, such as might be built by pioneers, whose only object in life was to cross a river.

Just beyond the bridge, a path started out across the lots. At the left stood a solitary house, alone and dreary, with no smoke ever arising from its chimney, and no one ever appearing near it, though it was supposed that a hermit lived there. On the right ran Arbor Avenue, and the backs of the barns that belonged to its houses formed the boundary between the great world and the respectable town. Ahead was the school-house, crouching with its back to the lots and protecting itself from the wilderness by a high board fence. The path ran from the shaky bridge to the corner of the school fence; a caravan route through the desert, a trail across the plains!

On the path, there were three fences to cross, a small drainage canal, not too wide to jump, a clump of tall trees to be traversed—robbers here, and elves and the spirit of the forest—and a sun-warmed gravel pit. Near school time there were always other boys, ahead to be called to, behind to be waited for, and the path itself always furnished things to talk about and things to do.

Here the Micks met. Amos was one of the crowd. He did not like them, as individuals, because he did not like noise and dirt and brutality, but they were the boys who went to school cross-lots, and nothing else in life was half so fine as that.

The Micks were freed from the restraints of Respectability; they could think of things to do that were quite beyond the grasp of ordinary imaginations. Phanor and Isabel might storm and argue and plead, but the wind in the tall tree-tops was speaking of far-off things, and Romance, bright and glorious, was waiting in the gravel-pit.

In spite of Amos' care to go around to the front door at school, as if he had come by the approved route, he was often caught, and singled out from his companions for punishment.

"Amos," said Miss MacReady. "Don't you know that your father and mother don't want to have you come to school cross-lots?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What do you suppose your mother would say if she knew?"

"She'd say I ought to be ashamed of myself for doing such a thing." Amos knew both sides of this dialogue by heart.

"Well, why do you persist in it, then? Don't you know that the nice boys don't come that way? "

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you enjoy being punished for it? Do you think I like to have to talk to you this way? "

"I shouldn't think you would."

Miss MacReady smiled broadly, but Amos didn't see it, so that she might as well not have smiled at all.

"You're not a bad boy, are you? "

"No, ma'am."

"Well, then, run along, and try to behave."

Often he was caught as he arrived home, and he was cornered on the parlor sofa to listen to the pleadings of his mother. Once or twice he had tried to explain why it was that he preferred the romance and adventure of the lots, even though they brought him into contact with the Micks. But though Isabel seemed to hear what he was saying, she did not understand it; though she caught a hint of the spirit of it, she did not see how it could possibly be anything in the life of her own son. He gave up trying to explain. Much as he would have liked to share it, he was forced to keep it to himself.

It was evident that one must choose between Respectability and happiness. When the natural antipathy between the Micks and Respectability broke out into open warfare, as sometimes happened, Amos

was always on the side of Respectability. By his comrades he was somewhat admired, in fact, for daring to lead a double life.

But Phanor and Isabel knew nothing of it. They saw that they could do nothing more than point out to him his own folly and wickedness. They did not know that he had made a cold and deliberate calculation to get what he could from life. He had never had the courage to tell them.

How could he take pleasure in things of which they did not approve? Why must they explain to him, over and over again, that their way was best? Why could he not see that they were safe, and he was not, and that therefore he must be wrong? How could any one worth bothering about be so blind as not to follow the lead of Phanor and Isabel Enday? Most of all, their own son?

It wasn't that they had forgotten what they were like when they were children. They could remember getting into just such scrapes as this, out of sheer perversity. But, of course, they hadn't gotten in quite so deeply, and the scrapes weren't quite so significant. Only, now that they were older, why the devil couldn't they be believed when they said they knew what they were talking about?

They were desperate with worry. They prayed, they threatened, they begged, they argued, they scolded—they did everything but think.

Then, when it seemed as if matters couldn't possibly get worse, there occurred the great Battle of Wilson's Barn.

Coming home along the cross-lots path, one day in Spring, Amos met Cliff Smoot, who was a leader among the Micks.

"Come on over to our house," Cliff said. "All the Army's going to be there."

"What you going to do? "

Cliff leaned close, though there was no one within half a mile.

"We're going to kill Bert Wilson and Dick Fleetwood."

"You can't do it."

"What's the reason we can't, I'd like to know? " Cliff asked, haughtily.

"Bert's gone home long ago," Amos said.

"They're going to play in Wilson's barn. We're going to attack."

"I got to go home."

"Well, come over as soon as you can."

Dopey Higgins appeared on the trail behind them, and ran up, calling to them to wait. He carried in his hand some object that swung from a wire.

"I got a stink-pot," said Dopey, arriving breathless.

"That's good," Cliff said. "Where'd you get it? "

"Made it," said Dopey. "It's got everything in it. Smell."

He thrust it under the noses of the two; it gave forth a horrible putrid stench, and both boys gagged and turned away.

"That's great!" said Amos.

"Oh, you wait!" Dopey cried. "You wait till old Dickey gets this in the side of the puss!"

"Come on; hurry up," Cliff said. "We got time to make some more."

The three set out along the trail, Dopey carrying the stink-pot at arm's length.

When they crossed Elm Street Amos left them.

"Hurry up, now, and get over," Cliff said.

"I don't know if I can come to-night."

"Well, try. Don't forget Thursday."

Amos found Isabel in the kitchen, making doughnuts.

"Mother, can I go over to Bert's?"

"Yes, dear. Only be careful of your clothes. Keep out of the barn."

"Can I have a doughnut?"

"Yes, dear. Don't you want to take one for each of the other boys?"

Amos took a handful of crisp, warm doughnuts, and set out on the run for Wilson's barn. There were signs of preparation for the approaching battle; Dick Fleetwood was in a clump of alders in the corner of the yard, cutting quarterstaves, and Kenneth Rogers was on guard at the great barn door. The Micks, under the personal direction of Cliff, were organizing their attack, which was to be across the fence in the rear.

"Hey, Amos!" shouted Kenneth. "Hurry up!"

Amos arrived at the door.

"Who goes there?"

"Friend."

"Advance, friend, and give the counter-sign."

"St. George for England."

"Gimme a doughnut. Hey, fellers, here's Amos."

Amos presented himself to Bert, the Commander, and gave him a doughnut.

"We got you and me and Dickey and Ken and Phil and the two girls," said Bert, reckoning up his forces.

"We'll kill 'em."

"We ought to get some stink-pots," suggested Amos.

"Oh, gee; yes!" cried Bert. "The girls can make 'em."

He called to Dorothy Wilson.

"Hey, sis, want to make some stink-pots? There's cans in the second stall, and you can get the fillers in the cow-shed. Hurry."

Dorothy, with Doris Spencer, accepted the halves of the remaining doughnut, and disappeared into the stall, where they were heard rummaging about in their search for suitable containers. A moment afterwards they repaired to the cow-shed, their arms filled with cans.

"Let's get some of this ammunition up-stairs," Bert said. "If they should happen to capture the down-stairs, we got to defend the hay-loft."

A trap-door in the floor above was opened, and fruit-baskets filled with mud-balls were hoisted up with rope and pulley. The upper floor of the barn, a great bare room, broken up only by the heavy timbers which supported the roof, was a veritable arsenal;

lath swords hung in racks on the walls; bean-pole lances were stacked in a corner; bills and halberds made of rake-handles and pitchforks leaned against the columns; while in the center a great pile of mud-ball ammunition was piled as high as a boy's head. The top of the stairs was protected by a portcullis, made from the lid of a piano-box, which could be raised and lowered; close beside it lay two twenty-pound iron dumb-bells, in position to be rolled down upon the heads of the attackers.

In the midst of this the boys paced up and down, telling of what they would do when the Micks came, brandishing their weapons in illustration of their boasts, and pausing now and again to hurl jeers and insults from the back windows.

Dick came in with his arms filled with quarterstaves, which he passed around; Ken followed him, dragging a piece of water pipe which might, he said, "come in handy."


"I locked the big door," Ken said. "Let's shut the portcullis."

"No; the girls are down there yet, making stink-pots," said Bert. He went to the head of the stairs and called down to them to hurry.

"I bet Cliff's afraid to come," said Philip.

"Cliff Smoot, lost his boot," chanted Bert from the window.

"I'm going up to the cupola and spy on 'em," said Dick. He mounted to the cupola, climbing in notches cut in the king-post of the roof-truss.



He had barely reached the cupola when the fight began.

The girls, to get more light for their work, had opened the door of the cow-shed; when Cliff led his men over the fence, in the first step of his campaign, the unprotected door yawned before him, an unexpected point of advantage. The Micks dropped their scaling-ladders, and charged the door. Before the girls could realize their danger, Cliff himself appeared before them, and a stink-pot came buzzing through the opening and crashed against the opposite wall. Doris replied with their own product, and Dorothy, against the shower of sticks and mud-balls, actually managed to close the door, though it opened outwards, and bolt it in the face of the leader. The shrill squeals of the girls announced this skirmish to the leader on the second floor, and a moment later the girls came breathlessly up the stairs and gasped out the news. The portcullis was dropped behind them, and Cliff, repulsed, reverted to his former plan, and turned again to his scaling ladders.

Dick threw himself full length on the floor of the cupola, thrust his head and shoulders down through the lubber-hole, shouted, "Here they come! They're trying to get in over the cow-shed roof! Here they come!" and disappeared again.

Above the cow-shed roof there was a small window, boarded up on the outside; Cliff and his men arrived on the roof, and attacked the window with a clothes-pole battering-ram.

Clouds of choking dust arose. Every one was mad, shrieking, rushing back and forth, trying to injure the invisible enemy by absurd devices which only the frenzy of desperation could have suggested; the air was thick with whirling swords and flying spears and clattering mud-balls; the crash of the battering-ram shook the building; the girls screamed.


The head of the ram came bursting through the boarding of the window; a splinter, two feet long, went singing across the room and struck Bert Wilson full in the mouth; down he went, the blood dripping from his chin. Panic madness swept through the defenders; they howled with rage, and threw whatever their hands found to throw.

"Dirty damn Micks!" screamed Dorothy Wilson, and whirled a stink-pot at the face of Cliff, appearing at the opening. A dozen bean-pole lances choked the space, and Cliff vanished.

Dick appeared again at the lubber hole in the cupola floor, screeching till he skinned his throat.

"They're coming up over the big roof!" he yelled. "They're coming up over the big roof! Gimme some mud-balls! Gimme ammunition! Quick! They're coming up . . ."

Something pushed him violently from behind; he toppled through the opening and came sprawling down, head first, passing in the air the basket of mud-balls that was being handed up to him. He fell half on his feet, staggered for a second, and pitched down through the open trap-door to the lower floor of the barn. In



an instant he was on his feet again, running in crazy circles, holding his hand to his mouth, his scared eyes staring out over his dirty wrist.

A puff of smarting white smoke came down through the cupola, and a red glare of fire. A trunk full of blazing hay was being pushed down through the lubber hole. It fell, split open on the floor, and roared. Ken Rogers rushed at it, clawing it apart with his halberd.

Through the smoke Dopey Higgins appeared, sliding down the king-post from the cupola; "Now we got 'em!" he screamed, balancing on the cross beam. Cliff, behind him, leaned in at the lubber hole, pelting mud-balls.

Amos drew back and sent a rake-handle lance flying at Dopey; it struck him in the stomach, doubled him up, and knocked him off the beam. He fell, clutching, into the midst of the swarming defenders, who seized and bound him.

Bert, in the background, faintly visible through the dust and smoke, was walking aimlessly back and forth, lifting his feet high in pain, mopping the blood from his face with his hand.

Down below, the great front door was wide open where Dick had fled for home with his dislocated thumb. Ken had mastered the fire. A Mick appeared at the opening over the cow-shed roof, plucking away the tangle of spears and wriggling through. Doris and Dorothy rushed at him and scratched his eyes and stole his cap.

Amos struggled up the center column of the barn, fell upon Cliff with his lath sword, and drove him from the cupola out across the roof. Cut off from his comrades, Cliff made for the ladder. Amos ran after him, caught the ladder and threw the top of it away from the eaves; it went soaring down into the barn-yard, Cliff still clinging to it, and landed on the pile of corn-husks at the foot of the wall.

The battle was over.

Amos, tired and dusty, went home to supper, thinking that the affair was of no special significance, and settled down to a quiet evening of reading with his mother.

A few hours later, however, Mr. Wilson called to ask if any one had been injured, and thus gave away the whole horrible truth. After Mr. Wilson had gone, Phanor, blazing with rage, called Amos into the parlor, interrupting Isabel's reading, and found out that Amos had actually been in the fight.

"Why can't you keep away from those dirty Micks, I wonder!" Phanor said. His round face was glowing with indignation, and his mustache stuck out like a brush.

"I wasn't with any Micks. I was with Dick and Phil and . . ."

"What's the sense in trying to tell me a thing like that? Don't I know? You were over in Wilson's barn, weren't you, when the whole thing happened?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"Well, then."

Isabel had come to the door of the parlor to assist.

"And to think that you'd go and flatly disobey me, Amos!" she put in. "I told you, word for word, to keep out of the barn and not to muss your clean blouse all up."

"Oh, he don't care for that!" Phanor assured her, ~~sarcastically~~. "It don't matter to him what's said to him. Good Lord, boy, I should think you'd want to be decent!"

"I wasn't doing anything, I tell you!"

"Your mother told you not to go into the barn, didn't she?"

"Yes, but I didn't say I wouldn't."

"Crickey! What's that got to do with it, I should like to know? What you can be thinking about all the time I can't see, for the life of me."

"Oh, listen, and I'll tell you," Amos cried. "I was coming home from school, and I met Cliff Smoot, and he . . ."

"I've told you you weren't to have anything to do with that Smoot boy," Isabel said. "I don't approve of him."

"Well, I can't help it if I meet him, can I?"

"Where did you meet him?" Phanor asked.

"In the lots," Amos said, before he thought.

"In the lots! Good God! You've been told to keep out of the lots. I wonder why the devil you keep on doing things you're told not to!"

"Well, anyway," Amos went on, "Cliff said there was going to be a battle, and he wanted me to go and

fight with them, on their side, and I knew you wouldn't want me to and I said I couldn't come over, and then I had to go and help Bert and Dick and the rest, didn't I? "

"What's the reason you did?" Phanor asked. "Walking right into trouble! "

"Oh, have I got to explain all that?" Amos exclaimed, with elaborate weariness. "I should think you'd be glad I was on the side of the nice boys."

"I don't want you to be in any fights, no matter what side you're on. What do you mean by fighting, hey? "

"Oh, I guess it won't hurt me any," Amos said, insolently. "I'm used to fights."

"Oh, hush your jabber!" Phanor cried. "Of all the boys you could play with you have to go and pick out the lowest rotten, dirty Micks. What's the matter with you, anyway? Are you a degenerate, or what? No more decency than a damn dirty pig! "

This was too much for Isabel.

"Phanor! Have you forgotten yourself, before your own child? "

"Well, what does he mean by talking that way to me?" Phanor said, sulkily.

"That's no excuse for your shouting so the neighbors can hear."

"Young reprobate! "

"Well, how can you expect . . ."

She was interrupted by the discovery that Amos, wearied beyond endurance by the sickening tedium of

a fight where nothing is at stake, had begun to cry. This was taken as a confession of guilt and a sign of repentance, and Phanor began again.

"Now, I want it understood that you're to keep away from that Smoot boy. You hear? And when your mother says you're to keep out of the Wilson's barn, I want you to do it. Now let that end it."

"All right," Amos said.

"All right!" Phanor shouted, his anger breaking out again. "Let me tell you, if I hear one more yip out of you, off you'll go to the Reform School. If they'd take you in. I don't know. Maybe the Insane Asylum . . ."

Isabel cut this short by suggesting that no further good could come of talking, and hustled Amos off to bed.

Upstairs, they spent a further half-hour in talk, and Isabel drove home the moral of the story. Amos was no longer to permit the existence of a world which permitted Micks. When he said his prayers, he added, in bitter scorn, "God make me like Papa and Mamma," but the implication of it was entirely lost on Isabel.

She went down stairs to Phanor, and told him, with tears in her eyes, that she was sure Amos would never be so naughty again.

Very well then; that was all Phanor had to say.

It was evident that Amos had lost his case. All hope of establishing the romantic and the adventurous was forever impossible. He had been caught red-

handed; he had said absurd things; he had wept in shame and true repentance. And nothing was gained.

None the less, they were frightened; they called for help. They called on Matthew Burton.

CHAPTER VI

MATTHEW BURTON was Superintendent of the Sunday School and Assistant to the Pastor of the Congregational Church.

At the Seminary he had been forced to wait on table in a student lodging house and care for neighbors' furnaces, in order to pay his way; he had graduated an obscure and underdone young man with a love of the better things of life and a stubborn determination to declare the Glory of God.

He had fought with Poverty, in the Seminary, and had come through all right; this was God's doing. After graduation, he had run against the "hard world," and had found it soft as mush in comparison with what he had expected; this meant that God was bearing him up in his hands. He had come down with tuberculosis, but some philanthropic persons had come forward with a sum of money which they had collected, and he had been sent to Switzerland, whence he had returned cured—or at least cured for all practical purposes—and eager to enter his field of work; surely it must be evident, from all this, that God had plans for him.

During his last year in the mountains, he had written a book of travel sketches and reminiscences, which,

though it did not sell very largely beyond the limits of the group of kindly people who had paid his bills and were "watching his career with interest," yet nevertheless served to preserve his self-respect. He had then settled down in Wilton, where, from the very first, he had wanted to be, and had obtained the post of Assistant to the Pastor, at a salary of nine hundred dollars a year, which he had accepted, after investigation, as a sign that God was lighting his path. He hoped, some day, to be able to return to Switzerland, and have another crack at independence.

The people of the church admired him somewhat for having been to Europe; there was something appealingly quaint in the idea of a minister going abroad. But, of course, he had had his poor health as an excuse.

He used to say that he had been through hell—though people knew that he was only joking—and that it was God's Grace that had brought him back to Wilton. In the case of an ordinary civilian, such a statement would have been damaging, for a man couldn't go through hell, even in fun, without bringing back some contamination with him. But people could trust a minister, they supposed.

He was pleasant and polite and zealous in his duties, and he prospered. He had married Fredrika Stubbs, a plump young woman from his home town, and they had a little daughter. The parish could ask no more. But Burton himself felt that he must, in some way or other, achieve success as a man.

One Sunday morning after the episode of Wilson's barn, Isabel stopped Burton as he was coming out of church, and, in considerable embarrassment, made her request.

"He's such a nice boy," she said, "and really good, at heart. But so often he plays with children who aren't so nice, I'm afraid, and they lead him astray. I was wondering if you couldn't suggest something that would make him a little more careful in choosing his associates."

"That's such a common difficulty with children, Mrs. Enday," Burton said.

But Isabel wasn't going to have this; hers was an individual problem, and the stock methods of training ordinary children, in the mass, wouldn't answer.

Burton saw his error, and changed his tactics.

"I'm sure I should be only too happy to do whatever I can," he said.

"That's very kind indeed of you," Isabel said. "If you could gain his confidence, and try to get him interested in other things, I'm sure we could work wonders. He's not a bad boy, only it does seem, sometimes, that he don't follow the good example that's been set for him, but only the bad ones."

As she went home, she was half sorry to have appealed. As soon as steps were taken to meet the difficulty, it seemed much less real. But the boy's whole future was at stake, and she couldn't afford to be too proud.

In due course, Burton called, and sat for some time on the edge of a chair in the parlor, slinging phrases back and forth and keeping up a pretense of not knowing why he had been summoned. Then Amos came in from school, and was called in to be presented.

Isabel said, "This is the boy."

"I'm very pleased to meet you," Burton said, holding out his hand with a smile of friendship that went straight to Amos' heart.

"Oh, most assuredly I should let him come to Sunday school," Burton went on, continuing the conversation with Isabel.

As soon as Amos had confirmed his suspicion that Burton was calling in an official capacity, he excused himself, and left the room.

They were palming off a minister on him, were they? Well, he would show them. If they thought he was going to be praying all the time, and listening to sermons, and add the problem of being morally good to the problem of being ethically good, they had another think coming. Pish, indeed! To know Burton as a man was all very well, and would give him opportunity to learn all sorts of interesting things about life which Burton, the man—who had, among other things, been to Europe, actually—would be able to teach him; but the minister part could go and pound sand in a rat-hole. He didn't want any old minister hanging around with his "yea, verily," business.

He was pleased with the joke of stealing some real life from a man who was a minister.

Amos was sent to Sunday school. Burton had general charge of the school, and conducted the Young Men's Bible Class, which was very popular; Amos was too young for the Bible Class, but he was put in a pen with some other boys of his own age and taught all the uninteresting things about interesting people, and Burton often threw a smile in his direction, and sometimes stopped to talk with him after school.

Burton had told Isabel that he didn't want to arouse the boy's suspicions, and that these matters must not be forced; in consequence, the acquaintance between the two did not begin to become friendship until Burton, one Sunday morning, suggested that they walk home together.

"I don't want you to think me a fusty old minister," Burton said as they set out.

Amos regarded this remark with deep suspicion. What made Burton think that any one would regard him as a fusty old minister?

"You know, I'm absolutely shut off from life, in my position," Burton went on. "As soon as I appear, people change; they know I'm a minister, and I never find out what they really think."

Amos considered this a terrible indictment of the ministry, but he did not say so.

"I wish you'd help me," Burton continued.

"How can I?" Amos asked.

"You can go to places where I can't be seen. You can talk to people on their own ground. With me,

people aren't natural. Don't you see what a tremendous help you could be to me? "

" I'll help you if I can," Amos said.

Burton stopped, right there in the street, and grasped Amos by the hand. Amos was greatly embarrassed; it was bad enough to walk home from Sunday school with a minister, without being seen shaking hands with him, for no apparent reason, right in broad daylight.

" I thought we were going to be just friends," Amos said.

"So we are! Very good friends, I hope. We'll get to understand each other. But, oh, if you knew the discouragement of trying to work in the dark! Of wanting to do so much, and being blinded! "

Amos thought that Burton didn't seem very willing to accept the consequences of being a minister.

After a few minutes of general talk, they separated at the corner of Burton's street.

Amos liked Burton, and hoped for something very splendid in friendship with him; he was a grown man, he knew all about the things that Amos wanted to know, he had been abroad, he was frank and friendly, he had read books. There was an assumption of intellectual equality between them—something that had never before obtained with any one. It was too bad that this must all be spoiled by trying to patch up an alliance which had for its object helping Burton out of the hole he had gotten himself into by being a minister. Still it was better than nothing; indeed, there

was nothing in life, so far, that offered greater possibilities.

When he got home, he explained his lateness by saying that he had been walking home with Burton, and that they had stopped to talk. Isabel said, "How lovely! I'm so delighted!"

Amos didn't want to accept Burton as a teaspoonful of medicine from his mother, and succeeded in avoiding him for two solid months.

Amos had grown up in his father's physical image, rather short and closely knit, though he was thicker through the chest, and generally stronger, than Phanor had ever been, and there was as yet no stoop in his shoulders. He had a frank, round face, and rather merry blue eyes, and he was continually bubbling over with energy and enthusiasm. From the hearty and joyous manner in which he played with his contemporaries, Phanor and Isabel saw that he really cared for nothing but being happy. But his greatest happiness always drove him away from the world into his own friendly company, and he spent his most serene, and, he thought, his most significant hours alone. They noted this tendency, too, and worried over it.

But could he go to his father, or Dick Fleetwood, or fuzzy old Miss MacReady, and confess that he thought life a lovely thing? He was continually making discoveries, and rushing away alone to think about them. There seemed no other way to make life real.

He was by this time in the seventh grade in school,

popular with his school-mates, and really respected by his teachers. Of course, they kept pecking away at him, trying to awaken him to a sense of the importance of learning his lessons, trying to get him to obey the rules, trying to drag him away from himself by precept and punishment and sarcasm and all the rest of it. But he held the whole tribe and the whole system in contempt, because it had not demonstrated its ability to explain life. He ignored them rather than fought them, and this being plainly evident, they were furious, and became unreasonable. He was hideously bored, but he endured it, because the time had not yet come for definite action. Some day, he was going to grasp life by the door-knob and swing it around his head—but not yet.

In the meantime, he was trying, as best he could, to find things out for himself.

Rose Purdy sat across the aisle from him. She was a dark-browed, contemplative mite, with stiff braids and straight legs; she puckered her freckled nose when she giggled, and her black eyes gleamed like shiny shoe-buttons when she was mad; she was irresistibly delightful.

He wrote her a note, in which he told her that she was the most beautiful girl in the world, and put it in a conspicuous position on her desk during recess. Bert told Amos that he had been a fool to sign it. Amos did not think so.

He watched for her to find it, expecting her to be instantly transformed into an even more radiant angel,

but she sniffed when she read it, and pretending that she thought it intended for somebody else, dropped it on the floor, where it lay in the dust with Amos' torn heart.

Later he recovered it, under pretext of picking up his ruler, cleaned it reverently, and took it home to show to his mother. Isabel drew him to her and kissed him. "Writing letters to the girls, is he?" she said.

The next day the news of Amos' romance had spread through the school. He was expecting this, and was braced for the storm of ridicule which, it seemed to him, was a natural consequence; but to his surprise, Rose achieved in the eyes of the whole boys' side of the school somewhat of the romantic desirability with which he had invested her. An association was formed for the purpose of kissing her.

Amos didn't like that. All the boys had "best girls," or pretended as much; he wished they'd let Rose alone! He couldn't, obviously, claim her as his own best girl, and as such protect her, for the story of his rejection was public property. But he resented the lack of dignity inherent in kissing. The ideal of love was so much finer than its attainment! However, he joined the association, and drew lots for his turn. But the first boy on the list got his face slapped, and the movement died. Amos was glad. Anyway, Rose wasn't as beautiful as Belle Brooke.

Once this had begun, there seemed to be no end to it. Phanor and Isabel had been fearing it, but now

that it was upon them, there seemed nothing they could do. Accordingly, they did nothing, and took out their uneasiness in hoping that it would all blow over.

As for Amos, who could not think of his parents as real people at all, he saw that they did not feel, and never could have felt, as he did. He could no more imagine Phanor in love than he could imagine him flying. In fact, he could much more easily imagine him flying. Isabel sometimes called Phanor "dear," but there was no passion in that—nothing like what was to be found in books—besides, she called nearly everybody dear. At first, he thought that they never mentioned love because they were unwilling to share their knowledge with him; later, he began to see that they were most probably ashamed of it; in the end, he concluded that they did not really know anything about it.

He had once asked Burton why unmarried people never had children, and Burton told him that all things were pure to the pure.

A few months after this, Isabel, in a hesitating and shame-faced manner, had given him a book which purported to explain everything which he had so laboriously discovered for himself; he accepted it in high hope, but the hope died when he opened it, and he was enabled to add nothing to what he already knew, nor anything to his ability to interpret.

He had thrashed out the whole matter with Dopey

Higgins. Dopey had put forward the facts, as a hypothesis.

"What's the matter?" he had asked, when he finished. "Don't you believe it?"

Amos mumbled something about God.

"Sure; what the hell!" Dopey had exclaimed. "God gives life to a baby, of course."

There seemed no more to be said. Yet it was strange that, in every department of life, there should be this same struggle between what was true and what was permissible.

The study of geography was the only subject of his school work of which he was not openly contemptuous. But he did not stand well in it; he never achieved great skill in telling what Borneo was like, because he was too thoroughly occupied in wondering what it must be like.

He got so far as to write, "The chief products of Borneo are timber, rice, jungle produce . . ." and Borneo itself lifted a shimmering bulk above the horizons of far tropic oceans, shutting out from view the Geography Test questions, the blackboard, the school-room . . .

He was exploring the mountain passes in the interior. Great bare hills lifted their huge sides above him, towering to the sky; in the still valleys lay the steaming forests of passionate life—gross flowers and monstrous leaves—and the friendly savages came out into

the streets of their villages to barter jungle produce for looking-glasses and beads . . . No; he had a house there, a substantial house of stone; it stood on a shoulder of the hills, looking out to sea; costly rugs covered the floors, and the walls of the rooms were surrounded with books; a table, set on the screened verandah, shone with white napery and gleaming glass; in that oasis which he had made for himself in the heart of the jungle he would live forever, shut in with the joys of his own outpost of civilization . . . Why couldn't it be true? Why must he stay shut up in this restless jail?

He stirred in his seat and drew a long breath of agonized impatience. He put his hand in his pocket, impelled to activity of some sort, found a match, drew it out, and sat regarding it . . .

No; better yet—he was on a tramp steamer—a rolling, roaring tramp, bound round the world—and the thud of her screw awoke the echoes along the silent sunny coasts . . . the sea was blue, blue . . . he turned his ship into the mouth of a river flowing out between the hills, and she crept slowly in, spreading the ripples from her bows . . . the whistle hooted, and set the birds to screaming in the forest . . . the engine-room bell clanged and died away . . . a wharf appeared around the bend, and on it stood a great warehouse, marked “Enday” in glaring white letters, and men in white suits ran out and naked natives hauled ashore the lines, and they asked what sort of trip he had

had, and what was the news from home, and looked seriously at yellow bills-of-lading . . . Fizzt! Puff! Horror!

He had picked at the head of the match with his thumb nail, and lighted it!

He blew frantically, and a column of smoke, as vast as from a volcano, rose in the air and hung betrayingly above him. He glanced up at the teacher with a hunted look; he was the center of a ring of scared faces. So well did he know what was coming that he was half out of his seat before he heard the stern command.

“Amos, leave the room!”

He left in shame and terror. Gee, what a thing to do! He had lighted a match in school! It was unprecedented. He didn't know what would happen.

He stood at the window in the hall, hidden by the long row of hats and coats that hung on the rack. The window was open, and the sweet clean air of Spring blew on his cheek. A wagon rattled past in delicious and unappreciated freedom; the driver leaned forward to club his horse with a stubby whip. The hall was very still. Far away in another part of the building the children were singing a song about the coming of Summer; he remembered the song, and listened sadly to the whack of the ruler on the desk, beating time. That would be Miss Whittier's room.

And he had lighted a match in school! He would have to endure a tedious interview, and be kept after school, and they would want to know what made him

do it, and where the match had come from—as if he had murdered somebody and stolen a match!

Anyhow, it wouldn't do to be caught with matches. He hunted through his pockets and found another, which he threw out of the window into the yard. Just in time. He heard an official step. Perhaps it was the principal. Perhaps she wouldn't see him. He fixed his attention on the row of hats and coats, keeping very still, hardly breathing . . . that was Louis Taylor's fuzzy cap; he seemed to see Louis under it . . . Too late!

"Well, Amos, what does this mean?" asked the Principal, glaring down at him.

Out with it, he thought.

"I lit a match in school," he said.

"You did—what?" Her amazement was gratifying, and Amos found himself becoming interested in the impending situation. He repeated his statement.

"Well, I should think that was a pretty foolish thing to do, and a dangerous thing, too. Tell me how it happened."

He explained as best he could, but he was bored again, now that the affair promised no more than an ordinary scolding. He took pains that his boredom should be evident in his tone.

"And this was in a Geography Test?"

He nodded.

"Amos, why won't you pay attention to your work? Your father and mother do everything for you, and you have good teachers. And I must spend my time

scolding and punishing and reproving you because you don't pay attention. Why do you make me do it? "

He spread his hands, wishing to imply that he didn't want to take her time.

"Ever since you've been in school," she went on, "it's been the same old story. You're not a dull boy; it's just because you won't pay attention. Your thoughts are always wandering off. And now this! In a Geography Test, you're 'sitting and thinking' and lighting matches! What can I do? I can't send home a good report to your father, can I? "

"Oh, no," Amos said quickly. He meant that he did not want her to lie on his account.

"You don't seem to realize the importance of your work. What do you think is going to become of you when you grow up? "

Here was the weak point—the dismal cloud of failure.

Amos wished he was out of it. Why couldn't he realize that the results of misbehaving were always the same?

"It just went off," he said, inconsequentially.

"What were you doing with matches? " Miss MacReady demanded, struck by a new thought. "It's dangerous, don't you know it is? Have you got any more? "

"I had another one, and I threw it out of the window."

"You did what? "

"This window," said Amos.

"Go out and see if you can find it." Miss MacReady's tone implied that this was the last straw.

Amos went out and found the match at once, lying on the cement which formed the pavement of the yard. He handed it up to the Principal.

She lighted it on the sill of the window, blew it out with an elaborate show of finality, moistened her fingers and ground away the cold ash, and then, after another searching inspection of the stick, which by this time looked quite innocent, threw it out of the window again. Amos was thinking how stupid he had been not to have thought of this in the first place, and so saved all the trouble.

"Now it can't do any harm," she said. "You wouldn't like to be responsible for setting fire to this building, would you?"

Amos saw about what the chances must be, and was ready to burst with indignation and scorn. Why, if Miss MacReady considered this a desperate chance, she must live in terror, day and night!

He told her that it was not his intention to burn down the school, but he was so sarcastic that she was angry again.

At that moment the bell rang, and a sudden roar from all the rooms indicated a stampede of feet and the putting away of books. School was out.

"Go to my room and wait till I come," Miss MacReady said.

The level afternoon sunlight came streaming in

through the windows of the Principal's office, and made the dingy little room seem almost gay. Amos leaned on the high sill of the window, sighing, looking out over the green expanse of the lots, watching his comrades dwindle to specks as they followed the trail, thinking unutterable things. Some far-away windows caught the glare of the sun and blazed it back again . . . he turned away, so as not to see it, and, in a mood of high revenge, set about memorizing the chronology of the Revolutionary War, which was written upon the blackboard for the pupils' confusion. Then he heard the Principal coming, and sank into despair.

It was a tedious interview. Miss MacReady couldn't beat him for such an offense as this, but she could bore him, and she did it. He tried to tell of his fancies about Borneo, though he knew it was a waste of time, and she pointed out to him that he had all day to think of such things. She urged him to say he was sorry, and to promise that he would never act so again, which he readily enough did, and let him go.

There remained the problem of explaining at home his reason for arriving late. There seemed no better way out of further trouble than the truth. So he told Isabel that he had been kept after school for having lighted a match, and added, in explanation, the whole story of Borneo.

Isabel pretended never to have heard of so mad a thing. Amos asked her if his fancies about Borneo were not really as true as Geography.

"Certainly not," Isabel said. "In a Geography

Test, your whole duty is to pay attention to your work."

Amos gave it up. Your imagination was evidently to be used only in odd moments, when you had nothing better to do. Imagination was all very well in private, but it would not mix with the world.

On his way home from the Mill that night, Phanor had happened to meet Miss MacReady, and she told him all about the match-lighting episode, partly to excuse herself for letting such things happen, and partly to let Phanor understand that she could not, with a clear conscience, send home a better report for Amos than the one that had been shaping itself in her mind as she walked home. But her real reason was to aid Parents in their crusade against Youth.

Phanor would have preferred to do his own spying, but the matter was by no means "over and done with," and he wanted to "get to the bottom" of it.

In the evening, Amos was sitting at the desk in the corner, his arithmetic book open before him. He had created a harp-like instrument with a rubber band stretched over a ruler, and was picking at it, holding it close to his ear.

"Stop that noise," said Phanor suddenly. "Haven't you got any work to do?"

"Just some examples," Amos said, putting away the ruler.

"Well, get about it, then. Good Lord, boy, don't you take any interest in your work?"

"All right," Amos answered, and turned to his arithmetic.

"Well," said Phanor, and pegged one for last word.

Amos computed how many sheep A would have left if he gave three-eighths of his flock to his eldest son and two-fifths to his second son, and fell to stabbing an eraser with a pen.

"What a shiftless, good-for-nothing boy you are, anyway!" Phanor exclaimed, glaring over the top of his paper. "How do you ever expect to ever amount to anything in the world?"

Amos bent over his arithmetic again in silence.

"What do you think he did to-day in school, Isabel? He was sitting playing with matches, in a Geography Test!"

"Yes," Isabel said. She had some idea of defending Amos. "He came home and told me all about it."

"Did he, though?" said Phanor. "It's a wonder he wasn't ashamed of it."

"Well, what did you expect me to do?" Amos said. "Lie about it?"

"Don't talk like a fool!"

"Well, you always try to make out I'm no good."

"I suppose you think you're a brilliant scholar. What you think to come to, I don't know."

"Oh, Gee! You'd think lighting matches was a crime!"

"Be careful of your language, my son," Isabel put in.

"Don't you try to twist my words around, you

idiot," Phanor cried. "You know perfectly well what I mean. Why wasn't your mind on the Geography, that's what I want to know, instead of something else?"

"It was on the Geography. I was thinking about the Geography so hard I never noticed . . ."

"Oh, stick your face in a book and stop talking nonsense!"

"How can I study if you keep talking to me?"

Amos turned about and faced Phanor over the back of his chair. It seemed as if he had had about all he could stand, for this one day.

"Crickey, boy, I don't see what's going to become of you. What do you think they'd do with a boy like you down at the Mill?"

"Fire him out," Amos conjectured promptly.

"Yes; well," said Phanor. "I guess so."

He sat for a moment regarding his paper. He had done all he could, God knew it; and now his son was headed for failure, and didn't seem to care.

"Don't you realize the importance of your work?"

Amos cried, "No, I don't! I don't think school has got anything to do with life at all!"

Phanor laughed.

"A lot you know about life!" he said.

"Well, I do! You're always trying to make out it's nothing but school. Lots of great men didn't go to school at all. Lincoln didn't."

Isabel came into the conversation.

"Lincoln studied at home," she said quietly.

"Well, that's what I'm trying to do, and you won't let me," Amos retorted.

"I suppose you think you're going to be a great man, hey? Is that it?" There was an ugly sneer in Phanor's voice. "Hey, Isabel, look at the young Abe Lincoln!"

Amos burst out in a scream of rage.

"Oh, it makes me sick!" he cried. "I'm sick of the whole damn business!"

Phanor jumped to his feet, flinging his paper across the room, and advanced on Amos, white with anger.

"One more word out of you, you young blackguard," he shouted, "and I'll send you up to bed!"

"You can't do it!" Amos flung back. "You've got to let me do my arithmetic."

Isabel rose and stood between them, trying to protect Amos from his father's wrath.

"Well, you get about it then," Phanor said. "I'd like to beat you within an inch of your life!"

"Phanor! Phanor! Not so loud!" said Isabel. Then she added, to Amos, "Tell mother where you heard that naughty word."

Amos' anger had been frightened out of him by this time, and he was sorry that he had revealed his familiarity with profanity.

"Some men," he said.

"Well, I don't want you ever to say such a thing again. You hear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

They went back to their seats, and Amos turned again to his arithmetic. He finished his examples, and went off upstairs to bed.

Alone in the dark, he saw the day's results somewhat differently. His parents got mad, and said stupid things, but it was his own worthlessness that made them do so. Perhaps, after all, they did know something. Phanor was a successful man, worked in the Mill, was married, and everything. Phanor was safe. The world couldn't touch him. This was probably life's greatest achievement; Phanor said it was, and seemed proud of it. Phanor ought to know what was necessary, then. And he said that Amos had no chance at all.

No, black doom had been written on the wall for him, since the very start of Time. He could never hope to be safe. Some day, the world would demand of him the very things that he had not had the patience to learn; then the results of his folly and wickedness would fall upon him, and he would be a failure. That was what was meant by not amounting to anything. It meant Failure. Safety was safety from Failure. No; he was a gone bird; there were no two ways about it.

Downstairs he could still hear their voices, and he felt a momentary return of rage at the thought that they were still discussing the wickedness of lighting matches.

He did not know that they were talking about Matthew Burton.

A few days after this, while Amos was engaged in cutting the grass of the front yard, Burton arrived, with every appearance of casuality, and asked Amos to come over and spend the evening with him. Amos was pleased; he had been afraid that Burton thought him unfriendly.

Isabel made him put on his best clothes, which he thought foolish—couldn't a boy go to call on his friends without getting all dressed up as if he were going to church? Isabel reminded him that Mr. Burton was a minister, so that going to see him was not unlike going to church.

Burton presented Amos to his wife and daughter; the girl was a fair, pale thing without distinction, and Mrs. Burton babbled and gushed, so that Amos was glad when the ladies withdrew and left them alone in Burton's study.

The study was a depressing room, atrociously furnished and filled with musty smells, but there was one nice thing about it: the walls were covered to the ceiling with books, and the books were books that were used. Amos had never seen anything like this before; it was like the things one read of.

After a period of gay and boyish conversation, of obvious artificiality, designed to make Amos feel at home, and to dispel the fusty old minister impression, Burton came to the real subject of the meeting.

"Do you remember saying that you'd be willing to help me, old man, if I needed it?" Burton asked.

"Yes."

"Well, the time's come. I want your advice in a matter that's been close to my heart for some time."

Amos supposed that Burton had gotten himself into some scrape by being blinded when he wanted to do so much. People had to be good, of course, and pious and all that, but the professionals always seemed to have the hardest time of it.

"I've always wanted to do boy's work," Burton went on. "That has been one of the things I've had ahead of me, through all my life. Recently, I've come to see that I shall never have more time for it than I have right now, and I'm going to go ahead. I've got a plan, for a beginning, and I'd like your opinion of it."

"Well, I don't know," Amos said, warily, not knowing what was coming. "I don't see how my opinion can be worth much."

"Yes, it can, my friend; you're a boy yourself."

"Gee, boys don't know what's good for them!" Amos said.

"Maybe they don't," Burton admitted, much amused. Then he proceeded.

A party of four or five boys—in which Amos, of course, was to be included—was to be taken to Europe under Burton's guidance. They were to sail as soon as school was out in the Spring, go through France and Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, England, and home, at the end of two months, from Liverpool. Now,

did Amos think such a plan would work, and did he think the boys would like it?

Amos was too delighted to think of any boy other than himself. He would enjoy it! A captive sea-bird would enjoy being released from a cage. It would work with him! The plan of being happy would always work. He danced about the room; he sang and laughed and cried; he hugged Burton; he fluttered the leaves of the guide-books which Burton dragged out to show him; and in the end he went dancing off home to tell the news.

He burst in. There sat Phanor with his paper across his knees, and Isabel busy at some embroidery.

"Listen!" he cried. "Oh, listen! Mr. Burton's going to take a crowd of us boys, with walking clothes and everything, and look after us and talk the languages and go to Europe!"

Phanor and Isabel stared for a moment; they could hardly make out what he was trying to say.

"This summer, when school's over," he cried again. "We're going to Europe!"

There was silence for a moment.

Then Phanor chuckled, and Isabel threw back her head and laughed. This, really, was too ridiculous! Amos, going to Europe? Amos Enday, their own son, talking of going to Europe, just as if . . . Amos? Why, they themselves hadn't even been to Niagara Falls, to say nothing of Europe. And Amos was talking . . . he . . . they . . . well, that *was* good!

That finished that.

Burton said he didn't see how he could make it that year, anyway, and substituted the idea of a Travel Club, to meet at his house on alternate Friday evenings, and read papers on the different countries they would imagine themselves visiting.

CHAPTER VII

AMOS had kept steadily before him the hope that some day he would reach the age of twenty-one, and could tell his father and mother to go to hell. He did not doubt that they would do his bidding at once. Then having cleared the air about him and the road before him, he could begin at once to be himself; it seemed to him that nothing but freedom from his parents was necessary for this. He considered his character formed and his whole plan of life arranged, ready for instant release when the time should come.

Yet he saw, too, that though there were several long years to be endured before this could happen, he ought, in some way or other, begin to prepare himself for it. But he did not know what steps to take.

It was clearly impossible to start the process of being himself by slow and cautious steps, for everything fine and inspiring which he had so far met in life had either been laughed out of him by his parents, or postponed "until he was older." Besides, no one ever heard of a really fine person being cautious. There seemed nothing for it, then, but to wait.

He saw, sweeping down upon him, the termination of Grammar School. He had long ago decided that it would perhaps be advisable to omit going to High School altogether, thus avoiding the cruel embarrassment of not knowing how to act. Now it was immi-

nent, and he must go through with it, whether he knew how to act or not.

Well, he had felt the same about marriage: he couldn't imagine himself ever asking a woman to marry him, because he didn't know how to act. People in books went through with the ridiculous ceremony with poise and distinction, but then, they were in books, and the lives of actual people were obviously quite different. He supposed that when the matter became imminent, and he found himself on his knees before the last woman on earth, some sense of the inevitability of the situation would clutch him and drag him through. Or, he might quote from the books—if they happened to be books that his particular woman had not read, that might not be so bad.

But, with High School, there weren't even the models in the books. The only real way out would be to give up High School altogether, and retrace his steps over the road of life. Yet the sun rose, day after day; High School, like the peak of a terrible mountain, rose over the horizon.

As his own contribution to the graduation festivities he was to recite Lincoln's Gettysburg speech, and the nervousness with which he anticipated his appearance on the platform added to the natural apprehensiveness of the occasion. It was a day on which special precautions must be taken against unpleasant occurrences. His part in the cantata of the infamous legend of Floyd Ireson was inconspicuous enough, and

caused him no uneasiness, but Lincoln's speech was put late in the program, and he worked himself into a hopelessly perspiring state of agony long before there was any need of it.

His time came at last, and he launched himself into the sea of Lincoln's great words in a spasm of haste and dread. His mother was in the audience, and she smiled up at him to encourage him, so that when he was half-way through, and saw that he was not going to forget his lines, or explode, or find himself suddenly without his clothes, he slowed down, breathed easier, and began to use some of the gestures he had been taught.

He had never before been so grateful for his mother. When he had finished and made his bow, he looked down at her as he was leaving the platform, and saw her nodding and smiling up at him under her pretty lace hat and clapping her little gloved hands in what seemed to him to be complete approval. He quite missed the idea that she was, in reality, applauding herself for having so brilliant a son.

He sank gratefully into his seat beside Bert Wilson, and seemed to look back over a long life of complicated achievements.

Bert leaned over and whispered behind his hand, "I'm going down to Waddy Brooke's after school. Come on down."

Amos felt that this was too special an occasion for mere play after school, and he hesitated. Must he not, somehow, be different, now that he had graduated?

"Come on," Bert insisted. "Belle's going to be there; she wants you to come."

Amos felt a thrill. Belle Brooke had sent for him! That could only mean that she loved him.

"Well," he said, not wishing to betray the eagerness which he felt, "I got to go home first."

"All right. I'll come with you, and then we'll go right on over."

Accordingly, when the celebration was finished, and the children had filed out of the dingy old school-house for the last time, carrying their diplomas and feeling stiff and formal in their best clothes and important in their new setting out into life, Bert and Amos freed themselves from the crowd, and set out for Elm Street.

Isabel had stayed at school for a congratulation contest with some of the other mothers, and was not at home when Amos arrived. The house was shut up and deserted. Amos would have wept if Bert had not been watching. It was so sad a thing to be shut out of one's house. And this was so important an occasion!

The two boys walked all around the house, inspecting all the carefully locked windows. Finally, Amos climbed the pole in the back yard and hid his diploma in the bird-house. The symbol of all his new achievements, hidden in the bird-house! He half hoped it would be stolen, or carried off by the birds; how would his mother feel then?

This was just as Amos had always feared; some great change would come, and Home would not even be aware of it.

The Brookes lived in a house of magnificent size, or so it seemed to Amos. Belle was a Queen, on a throne; she was shut off from the world by tall iron gates, and separated from the common crowd of mankind by a splendid garden. Her environment, no less than her reputation and her beauty, set her apart, and made her inaccessible.

The boys came in at the carriage gates, and as they passed along the drive, Bert gave a peculiar whistle, which was answered from the barn, where Waddy Brooke, his sister, and another girl, named Jane Lane, whose red hair Amos had noted, but with whom he had never spoken, were playing together. The three appeared at a hay-door on the second floor, and called to them to come on up.

Amos loved a barn. This was a very different place from the disused old ruin in which the armies of Respectability used to withstand the attacks of Cliff Smoot in the days when there were Micks, for there was a hay-loft here, and horses, and carriages in the carriage-room, and a room for the hired man with a hired man actually living in it.

Amos was introduced. He was rather bewildered. He did not know how to act. He found himself, so to speak, on a stage during a performance in which he was the only one who did not understand what was going on. However, he was soon completely in love with Belle, and that made it easier for him.

Waddy soon left them, and the four were obliged to amuse themselves. As a means of breaking the ice—

which was rather necessary, since Amos was embarrassed now, by the presence of Jane and Bert—it was suggested that they play forfeits. In the first round, Bert said “the owner of this”—meaning Amos’ knife—“must kiss Belle Brooke ten times.” He fulfilled his obligations, but did not stop at the end; he caught Belle tight in his arms and kissed her on the mouth. From this he raised his head, in a glow of enthusiasm at her sweetness and his own unconquerable daring, to find that the others had clattered laughingly down the stairs and left them alone. It rather pleased him that they should have been able to get away without his noticing it; it meant that he was caught in a net of love and beauty, and so he told Belle. Her heart was won immediately at this—if it needed any winning—and they promised eternal fidelity.

Amos had always regarded kissing as a foolish concession to convention; people in books—no matter; he himself did not know how it should be done, and thought omission the best way out of it. Belle convinced him at once of the folly of this.


He found that making love to her came as naturally to him as Spring sunshine comes to a flower. Here was a secret penetrated. Why, it was a part of the Conspiracy, and he had solved it for himself! Love, after all, was not something in a book; it was within himself! He had but to listen, and the voice of it filled his heart.

They sat there in the hay, with the swallows twittering and darting about among the rafters above their

heads. Belle talked with him as another boy would talk—with a thousand added delights, of course—she was profane where there was occasion for profanity, and nearly everything she said had a double meaning. It never crossed Amos' mind that she was like this by actual character; he thought that he had broken through the protecting wall and found the key which brought him into the presence of her inmost self. He felt that he had created her for his own delight. Thereby, had he but known it, he arrived at the heart of the matter.

He won her, and lost her, and won her again, in delightful repetition. They pretended to quarrel, and made it up again; they discovered new kinds of kisses; they talked about how they loved each other. They wanted no more than this.

Their most important revelation was that neither of them, ever again hereafter, would be more than half alive without the other. Amos thought that he had discovered all this; it was, in his mind, one of those independent discoveries of which one sometimes reads; other people had perhaps found it out, at other times and in far-away places, but he too had hit upon it, without knowledge of their researches. This explained how it was that people had always acted as if there were such a thing as love, actually existing; they had found it, and now he had found it; every living soul on earth had either caught this ideal, or was pursuing it. Human nature included Amos Enday. There was something miraculous about it. Belle, with her



laughing eyes and willing mouth, was a confirmation and a materialization; she was a vision come true for him, his book, his experience, his life. And so he told her.

She did not then understand, nor can it be said that she ever did understand, that she was no more than one who holds open a door for another.

Some one called Belle from the house, telling her that it was time for supper. They parted as tenderly, and at as great length, as if forever. A dozen times Belle called him back to kiss her again.

He went home feeling like a King. The world was filled with Romance and Beauty; delight was all about him, free, open to the sky, and, by its very intensity, incapable of being denied. This, no power on earth should ever thwart. Nothing should ever stop him again. He had met his lady and won her, and life, from this point on, was all that he had ever hoped or dreamed it.

When he reached home, Phanor had already arrived from the Mill, and they were about to sit down to supper without him. Almost he wished they had done so; he would have liked to tell them that being late to supper was a very unimportant thing.

"Well, where have you been till this time of night?" Phanor asked. "Didn't you know it was time to come home?"

"Oh, I've been out somewhere," said Amos, jauntily, "minding my own business."

"Don't be impudent," said Isabel, who had come to the kitchen door to hear Amos explain.

"You have, hey?" Phanor said. "Well, you'd better stayed back there with the children."

"Oh, I guess not," said Amos.

"Don't you talk that way to me, boy! If this is what getting out of school has done to you, you'd better stayed there with the children."

"Getting out of school's got nothing to do with it," Amos replied.

"There, don't make trouble," Isabel said. "Don't you know by this time, that you ought to come home after school?"

"I did come home, and there wasn't anybody here."

"Now, don't begin to lie about it," said Phanor.

"Your mother knows, don't she?"

"No; she wasn't here herself. How soon are we going to have supper?"

"Right away," said Isabel, turning up the gas in the dining-room. "We were just waiting for you."

"Well, I guess I'll get my diploma, then. It's in the bird house. It might get damp."

Outside, the world was filled with quiet twilight, and the robins were singing. How sad and beautiful!

During supper, Amos told the story of the deserted house and the hidden diploma, making it as startling as he could, enjoying the chagrin which his parents evidently felt at having left him to his own resources on so important a day.

Later, he took a book of Browning's poems over to

the corner with him, and sat for some time listlessly turning the pages in search of something which should come near to expressing what he felt. Oh, the glory and joy of knowing that he was right! Oh, Belle, Belle! My darling, my darling! Your kisses on my lips, your hands on my cheeks, your eyes like stars in the sky!

"What are you feeling so gay about, young man?" asked Phanor, who had been watching over the top of his paper.

"I guess I'll take up the study of Browning this summer," Amos replied, seriously.

Phanor and Isabel exchanged amused glances.

"Humph!" said Phanor. "Pity you didn't get ambitious before it was all over!"

"It's not all over," Amos said. "It's just beginning. I've always wanted to know about poetry, and they never give us any in school."

"Why, what a way to talk," Isabel exclaimed. "Think of all the poems you've learned to recite!"

"Yes; Village Blacksmith and Floyd Ireson and Santa Topsy! Lot of school stuff!"

"Well, what next?" said Phanor.

"Isn't Browning all right?"

"He was a great man," said Phanor solemnly.

"I guess I'll go up to bed," Amos said. "I'm tired."

He rose and went upstairs, taking the Browning with him. As soon as he was out of hearing, both Phanor and Isabel began to speak at once.

"Well, of all things!" said Isabel.

"What's come over him?" asked Phanor.

"I guess he's relieved about school being over with," Isabel suggested. "I'm afraid he hasn't enjoyed it as he should."

"Too bad about him!" said Phanor. "Crickey, I wonder what's going to become of the boy?"

"He's not a dull boy; I guess he'll get there, some day."

"I hope so. It don't seem likely, though. Isn't that just like him! The very day he gets through school, he wants to do some studying. And Poetry, too."

"Well, it is funny," Isabel agreed. "But I think it's a good sign."

"I suppose he might learn something, at that," Phanor conceded.

"He may develop into quite a student in High School and College; you can't tell. Look at Gerald What's-his-name; always at the very tail end, all through school, and he took prizes in college."

"College?" said Phanor, as if the idea were new to him.

"Why, yes. Don't you remember? He got a medal for something, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but what's that got to do with Amos?"

"Why, I was just thinking that sometimes boys that are backward in school sort of . . ."

"Who said anything about Amos going to college?"

"Well, nobody. But I thought it was all decided."

"That's news to me. I simply said it might be a

good thing; it was just a suggestion, that's all. And here you turn around and say it's all decided! "

" Well, I was just thinking, that's all. It's got to be decided pretty soon, you know."

" Why has it? " Phanor asked.

" Why you told me yourself, Phanor. You have to put in an application, or whatever it is, for the High School, to say whether you want him to take the College Preparatory Course, or the other."

" Oh, I don't know what I said! But what if I did? " There's no such hurry, that I can see. What's the sense of rushing off all of a sudden, without taking a little time to think it over? "

" There's nothing to be gained by putting it off till the last minute, either," Isabel said. " I don't want him to come tagging along at the very tail end, all the time."

" The boy's whole future's at stake, Isabel."

" I know."

" Oh, I suppose the college course is the one to take. I don't know. Have you got that catalog there? "

Isabel found the High School catalog under the pile of magazines on the desk, and passed it across to Phanor, who began to turn the leaves.

" Crickey, look at all the stuff they give them! " I never had half this stuff; I'd know more than I do. All this stuff . . . It's just a question of what we want to make of him, that's all."

" Well, you know the requirements down at the Mill better than I do, of course," Isabel said. " Whether

it's a question of the college course, or the other . . ."

"Of course, a college man has a greater opportunity. The Mill is looking for college men, all the time. But it's not a question of just making a successful man of him, Isabel. Of course, I want him to be a success; that's only natural. But there's other things to consider. A liberal education's a great thing; gives a man a start. If the boy's got something in him, we ought to develop it, that's all."

"I'd like to have him a college man," Isabel said. "Of course, it's too early to tell what he's going to amount to; we won't know that till he's started in life."

"I can see the difference, down at the Mill; the men that have been to college are free in their tastes. The others are apt to get into a rut; just plugging along, and getting nowhere. Good, honest fellows, too, for the most part."

Perhaps Phanor now dimly felt that since no one had ever told him what life was about, he could not tell Amos; at any rate, he leaned on college as a prop. He wanted to place the whole matter in the hands of those whose business it was to take such responsibilities; he could then tie up in one bundle all the advantages of a college education, bestow it on his son, and pay the bill. He said that paying the bill was all he was good for, but he didn't mean anything by that.

Isabel saw very plainly that life lacked something, and thought that perhaps college was the very thing to supply it. But she hoped that she should find

strength not to interfere in matters which were, after all, none of a woman's business.

"I should say, offhand, that the college course was the one to take," Phanor said. He had been looking through the catalog again, and found, he thought, a certain lack of distinction in the other courses.

"That would be what I should say," Isabel said. "The application is right there in the front of the book."

"Yes, I saw it."

"Well, don't you want to fill it out and sign it, right now? Then it'll be done."

"There you go again! Always rushing off! What's the hurry, all of a sudden? Why not take a little time to think things out, on an important thing like this?"

However, in the end he filled it out and signed it, and spent the next few weeks in distrusting colleges.

As for Amos, it was some time, naturally, before he could get to sleep. His graduation from Grammar School was involved, in his imagination, with finding Belle. He had caught up a thousand threads of hopes and delights and enthusiasms, and bound them together in one enduring fabric of purpose which was beyond the reach of all conjecture and speculation. He would have been astonished if he could have heard his parents talking about getting him started in life. In his view of the matter, he was started now. This was not a thing he could take calmly.

He was gratified at the difficulty of going to sleep, and made a martyrdom of it. Next to being assured that Belle cared, it was most pleasant to be assured that he cared himself. His inability to drop off to sleep was satisfactory proof of this.

He thought not so much of Belle herself as of her ability to bid him awake and see the dawn. For this power he gave her all due honor. She must be a very fine and wonderful person to be able to do this; she had made all the important things in life march out, shoulder to shoulder, in one irresistible effort, towards one glorious goal. This was something no one else had been able to do for him. Even Burton, with all his culture, had not been able to do it. He must see Burton—well, not to tell him the whole story, exactly, but to confirm things, to seek out and find concurrencies and consistencies.

His habit of thought then led him to the consideration of practical measures. Success was really very dear to him, for duty was dear to him, and what his parents wanted him to do was duty. Now, how could he turn this new power of his to the attainment of success? He had here a master key, which could unlock anything; why not let it unlock the door that led to the difficult business of succeeding in life? Why, a week ago he would have been normally crushed by the thought that the aim of life is the prevention of happiness; now, though he thought of it none the less, it did not seem to matter. Now, he was in a position to force the world to yield both happiness and success.

Let him but have patience and courage, and the whole of life was solved.

He must get to understand Browning, and all other poets.

He was nearly asleep.

There were the *Memoirs of Court Life*, too, which he had found in the library, and thought very dull; now they would have a new meaning for him, and he would read them. How wonderful to be thus one with the Great! How delighted his father and mother would be, when he told them! How splendid to take this thing which they would regard as unimportant and valueless—and even, he supposed, they would regard it as wicked; yes, certainly they would—and use it to make a better man of himself, thus turning it into an undeniable virtue.

The question of marriage did not once come into his mind, even to the extent of his deciding against it. He went to sleep, clutching the Browning, and, to his deep chagrin, dreamed nothing whatever.

He awoke very early the next morning, and heard the birds singing. He lay for some time listening, breathless with delight; the world and life, infinitely lovely, had at last come close.

It occurred to him that he might go and sing beneath Belle's window—the gray dawn is breaking—but that was before he was really awake.

When he had gotten up and dressed himself, he sat at the sitting-room window, looking out into Elm Street. The people who passed were people whom he

had never seen before; probably they always passed at this time, while he was asleep upstairs—but what an altered aspect they gave the world!

He sat wondering how he was to manage to keep his grasp of life, now that he had it. He heard his father's footstep upstairs, and was uneasy at once. What should he say when he was questioned?

He hid himself under the sofa in the parlor while Phanor came down, rummaged in the kitchen, took the paper from the front steps, and went up again. Then he returned to his place by the sitting-room window.

Isabel came down presently, and found him there.

"Why, whatever's the matter!" she cried in amazement. "What's happened? Are you sick?"

"Nothing," he answered. "I'm all right."

"But what does this mean? What made you get up so early?"

"Oh, I just happened to wake up, and I thought I'd come down."

"But what a funny thing to do!"

Amos fell to wondering how the man who sang of the gray dawn beneath the window of Kathleen Mavourneen managed to escape his mother's questions. What did he say when she asked him what made him get up so early? It was like Browning, going off to live in Italy. His mother must have made a fuss about that. It must be that he had had no mother. But were all heroes and great men orphans?

After breakfast he told Isabel that he thought he'd go and see Mr. Burton. She made no definite objec-

tion, but said that she thought it was a funny thing to do.

On his way, he reflected on the questions he wanted to ask. He must find out from Burton how an inspired man should act. If you suddenly found yourself in the grip of an enthusiasm that would not let you sleep, what did you do about it to make it seem sane? If you were Browning, and, some morning, told your mother that you thought you'd go and live in Italy and be a great man, what did you reply when she said, "Ho, ho! Look what's going to be a great man!" By the time you'd gotten through arguing about it, you went to Italy just out of spite, and all the inspiration was gone out of it.

Of course, you could just run away, saying nothing to any one—hide under the parlor sofa with your satchel, and sneak off. But you couldn't prove your point until you were really famous, and that wouldn't be until after your mother was dead. There could be little satisfaction in that.

It was important to know these things. Burton would know.

A gentle breeze was stirring the leaves of the maples, and the broken sunlight was dancing on the floor of Burton's porch.

Burton came to the door himself.

"Hello, old man," he said.

Amos noticed a solemnity in Burton's manner, and a hush about the house. What was it? Why did everything seem so strange?

Then Burton told him that his wife was seriously ill; that she had been stricken during the night; that the doctor was with her, but could offer, as yet, little encouragement.

"Oh!" cried Amos. "I'm so sorry! Why, I can't . . . it doesn't . . . Oh, on such a beautiful morning!"

"Yes," said Burton, softly, smiling. "God's beautiful morning. It's as if Heaven were opened, is it not?"

Amos understood, but could say nothing. He choked out some meaningless words and turned away.

He knew, in his heart, that Mrs. Burton was going to die. How was Burton to endure it? How could he himself endure it for him? It seemed a terrible thing that Death could come walking into the midst of life, take what he wanted, and walk out again, with no one able to protest or to prevent.

At home, he wandered about the house, disconsolately looking for something to do to pass the time until two o'clock, when he was to see Belle. But he took good care to keep out of the way of his mother.

By lunch time he had worked himself into a state of loneliness and misery that made his heart ache. He explained his depression by telling of Mrs. Burton's illness. But nothing really mattered, now, if only he could see Belle.

They met on a street corner. Amos was early, and spent a quarter of an hour thinking that he should die

of anxiety and impatience. But at last she came. He saw her, like a queen, coming to meet him. How wonderful and beautiful she was!

He asked her, first, if she still loved him. It appeared that she did, and they shyly shook hands, hoping to give the impression, to all the people who must, they felt, be watching them from windows, that they were casual acquaintances, who had met by chance. Then, Belle wanted to know, did Amos still love her? Of course he did. He was a little angry with her for asking it.

Across the lots, the little river that flowed through the town ambled out between some rolling hills, and went wandering away across the country. This gap in the hills was visible to them as they stood on the street corner, and naturally suggested that they set out to follow the river. A part of its course was already known to Amos and the other boys of his group, because it afforded several swimming-holes to which they were frequent visitors during the summer. But beyond the swimming-holes the country was unknown and undiscovered. Several farms were scattered about, at infrequent intervals, but in the main the land was uninhabited, and seemed to offer the combination of adventure and seclusion that Belle and Amos wanted.

Accordingly they set off across the lots, over the shaky bridge, and began to kiss each other as soon as the shoulders of the hills had shut them out from view of the town.

Amos was wise enough to see that he must not tell

Belle of all the dreams he had had since he had last seen her; it would be too frank a confession that she was, after all, no more than a means to an end. But he told her all the rest of it, however, and made her happy, and it was not long before he had completely convinced himself that it was Belle he cared for, and not the new opportunities for life which she had given him. So they wandered very happily, hand in hand, beside the river.

When they reached the first of the swimming-holes—which, by some miracle, they found deserted—Belle suggested that they go in swimming. Amos was pleased with this dashing idea, finding it so thoroughly in accord with his new conception of the freedom and beauty of life; it was, moreover, the very pinnacle and climax of desperate wickedness, and seemed fitting for one who had done forever with his narrow past and had taken up the study of poetry. But when it came to actual preparations, they found that they lacked the courage to proceed, and the project came to nothing.

This exploring and adventuring were new to Belle, who had always before confined her researches within the boundaries of civilization, and she was grateful to Amos for revealing its possibilities. And before very long, as might have been expected by any one who had known her for a longer time than Amos, its effect on her became so pronounced that she threw overboard the small amount of restraint which her character had left her, and began to talk and behave in a truly alarming manner.

Amos tried for a time to enter into this spirit, and Belle, under such encouragement, sank lower and lower; but, in the end, it distressed him and hurt him. It was simply dirtiness, and he resented its familiarity with love, which seemed so pure and splendid a thing, and with Belle, whom he had put on a pedestal in the very center of the temple where he worshiped. It did not occur to him, even then, that his kisses meant to her something vastly different from what hers were meaning to him.

This wouldn't do, at all. He came to the conclusion that he must risk losing everything, and protest.

Belle was not ashamed, but surprised. To her, it seemed the height of absurdity to thus recall the threadbare standards of morality which she had deliberately abandoned in her own life as soon as she found that they were in conflict with the natural impulses. Moreover, she could see in Amos' action only the folly of a man who, finding a broken wall between himself and the mysterious country of license, set to work to build it up again. She was astonished that any one could be so blind to opportunity.

Amos won back her confidence by telling her that he loved, worshiped and adored her, and then, having made her willing to listen, started to preach. This was a field with which he was familiar. All the tenets of morality which he had so bitterly and scornfully rejected when they had been brought to his own attention, he now poured out to her. He recalled things that he had heard Burton say; he brought out whole sections

of Sunday School; he invoked the True Faith and the Divine Revelation, though these were things for which he had hitherto felt nothing but incredulity and impatience. In the end, he asserted that he was her lord and master—which was true enough, for she was his even more completely than he realized—and said that he did not want her to act as she had been acting, and that she must stop it. To none of this could she find any answer, and she promised to be good.

It was by this time rather late, and they were at a considerable distance from home. As they started to retrace their way, they gradually regained their mood of gaiety, and before long Amos had caught her in his arms again. She rebuked him, accusing him of naughtiness and of too soon forgetting his protestations of morality, and they spent another half-hour in going over the same ground again, while Amos tried to point out the difference between love and naughtiness.

Finally the matter was clear for all practical purposes, and they separated on the street corner where they had met, after almost endless protestations of love and devotion.

The events of the afternoon made Amos very thoughtful. The sky of happiness was still without a cloud, and Belle herself was no less dear in actual presence, or radiant with bright possibilities; but the problem of making her of practical advantage, of forcing success in living from inspiration in life, had become vastly more difficult. He was going to reform her, to

make her over into something which should better fit his conception of what she should be, and what life might be.

There must be no pulling in opposite directions; he had had enough of that. All things must work together for good. He did not doubt that love was equal to this task, and he found courage within himself to attempt it.

He saw that the campaign was dangerous, since he would, in part, have to fight himself. He saw that it was difficult, for he would have to reconcile and bring together two points of view which lay at the furthest possible distance from each other. A life of inspiration, which moved in utter disregard of consequences, must be brought to go hand in hand with a life of daily anxieties which never made a move except for safety.

It was thus that the parlor at 97 Elm Street forced its way into the very heart of existence.

CHAPTER VIII

PHANOR began to have a confused idea in the back of his mind, produced, perhaps, by watching Amos, that something might be found to interest the boy, and give him a serious view of life. He had no real idea of a serious view of life himself; he supposed he meant the ability to worry about things.

"Crickey!" he said one day to Amos. "I should think you'd like to do some experimenting—with chemistry, or something."

Amos had a swift vision of himself in an acid-stained gown, pottering about test-tubes and retorts, while Belle looked breathlessly over his shoulder to watch the outcome of some great experiment which had for its object the chemical reconstruction of the world.

"I wish there was some place around the house we could devote to it," Phanor went on, being perfectly sure there wasn't.

"Maybe I could fix up a shop in the laundry," Amos suggested.

"And burn the house down," Phanor said. "What would prevent your putting your eyes out with some explosion, hey?"

The matter of the laboratory was never arranged, and Phanor's idea went the way of so many others.

Phanor had been looking back over his own school

days, and he could not remember—he had asked Isabel about it, and she couldn't remember, either—any such renaissance of interest on graduation from Grammar School, as this which now seemed to have come to Amos. It hadn't made any great difference to them to get out of one school and into another; but here was Amos, out of Miss MacReady's clutches, leaping eagerly forward into a life of complex activity, as if the whole world were altered. He was a strange boy.

He knew they wouldn't have minded his making friends with girls, or even having a "best girl," so long as he made nothing of it and appeared to be getting nothing important from it; but Belle was different, and he did not mention her. It was plain to him that they were puzzled by his new attitude—well, they had fooled him, often enough.

He began to cultivate the library. This was an approved source of knowledge, and made no threat to blow the roof off the laundry.

Every evening he brought home four books—the maximum number allowed to one borrower—from the loan department. He chose the most varied subjects, ranging from the Theory of Magnetism to Bee-culture; everything in print interested him, so long as it was not school work.

On the first floor of the library, convenient to the main entrance, was a magazine room. Amos had never dared to go in, for there was a sign on the door which stated that it was "For Readers Only," and he was not sure that he could include himself in this designation.

Several times, as he had stood hesitating at the door, he had noticed an untidy old gentleman in a battered derby hat, who fussed about a great deal among the magazines, and once, while he was trying to gather courage to enter, the man came out and spoke to him.

"You know you are welcome to this room, do you not?" the old gentleman had said.

"Well," Amos answered, apologetically, "I don't get much time to read magazines."

The old gentleman smiled, and said, "The knowledge of the whole world is here; don't neglect it. I am an inventor, myself; I get my greatest pleasure in life from the magazines."

He smiled again and nodded in a friendly way, and went shuffling back into the magazine room again, whither Amos followed him. He had said, "I'm an inventor, myself . . ." That "Myself" implied that Amos was something, too. Why had no one ever treated him in this way before? It must be that he was getting to be some one. That was Belle's doing, of course.

He spent a great deal of time, after this, among the magazines, and often he had long talks with the old inventor, who never seemed to be too busy to drag out something interesting. Amos was delighted with the idea that he was now able to discover people for himself.

Phanor and Isabel sometimes pawed over the books which he brought home, to discover what he was doing, but, out of embarrassment, they always waited until

he had gone to bed before they did this, and he never knew that they had the least curiosity.

Couldn't they see that he was now on the road to success? Why, it was life's greatest achievement, and they were taking it as a matter of course!

It was all in his own consciousness, which they had never entered.

He soon discovered that it was not necessary for him to go to the library whenever he said he did; it was a simple matter to choose some books in the afternoon, hide them in the feed-box in Wilson's barn, and get them, later, after he had spent an evening with Belle.

In the rear of the Brooke's house there was a garden; a smooth grass-plot, surrounded by flower beds and borders of high shrubs, backed by a line of poplar trees, in which the wind seemed always pattering. In one of the corners remote from the house, Belle had contrived a bower; the stems of some of the shrubs had been cut off, and a few boards, covered with scraps of matting, formed a floor. Here she would wait, every evening, to receive her lover, who pushed through a gap in the picket fence at the rear of the garden and came crawling on his hands and knees through a dark tunnel among the leaves. In this secret seclusion they spent many hours, looking up at the stars through the close foliage overhead, and assuring each other that no two people, since the beginning of the world, had ever been in love as they were.

Sometimes, when Frank, the coach-man, spent an evening "up street," they tiptoed carefully to the barn

and climbed the creaking stairs to the hay-loft. It was inky black, and the only sound, beyond their own guarded whisperings, was the gentle ticking noise in the hay; they could hear the rattle of distant wagon wheels in the street outside, and used to enjoy the thought that the world was going by, unknowing of their existence, leaving them alone and happy. Once or twice, Frank came home earlier than usual, and then the adventure of getting out, past his door, was one of delicious danger. They held tight to each other's hands, refused to breathe, and moved an inch at a time.

At nine o'clock, a curfew was rung on the bell of the dingy little wooden chapel that stood across the street from the school-house, and this was the signal for separation. The time came, inexorably, for one last kiss, one final good night, one more desperate clinging together, on breaking which they seemed to leave their hearts behind; it was as if the world had ended, and naked empty space rushed up from every side to overwhelm them.

Then Amos tiptoed down the length of the garden on the quiet grass, wriggled through the gap in the fence, and went home heart-sick with loneliness. He got his books from the feed-box in the barn, and presented himself in the sitting-room, fresh from the library.

This went on for some time, and then Waddy Brooke discovered the bower in the garden. He removed the boards and matting; Belle and Amos put them back again. He led his friends to the spot, and broke in upon them, time and again, with jeers and cries of

"shame!" They shifted to the hay-loft, and Waddy found them there; he told Frank to be on the look-out for them, and destroyed the secret with laughter and teasing songs. In the end they were driven out, and sought seclusion farther from home.

On the other side of Arbor Avenue, there was a large open field, given over to the storage of horse-cars. On long, uneven lines of track that sprawled across the field the winter cars stood in compact ranks, their doors closed, the blinds drawn up before their windows. The yard was but a few blocks from Belle's house; it was always deserted. Belle and Amos claimed it, as a sanctuary, and in the midst of it escaped the prying world. They met at the corner of the yard, under the black shadow of a spreading beech tree, and crept together down the long alley between the tracks until 756, which was the number of the car they had selected as their own, loomed before them in the starlight. They pushed open the sliding door, and closed it noiselessly behind them.

It was a perfect hiding-place, and they enjoyed the secrecy of it even more than the seclusion that it afforded them, for, beyond assuring each other that they were in love, and making further plans for daring escapades and dangerous adventures, they had nothing to talk about. Amos knew that Belle was not interested in his plans for himself; she did not care for the person he hoped some day to be; she cared for him as he was, and he tried to be satisfied. She even enjoyed his attempts at reforming her, and used to try to pro-

voke them, for restraint, to her, was a rather pleasant novelty.

"Listen, darling little girl; God sees everything you do, do you know it, and hears everything you say."

"I'll bet it shocks Him, then," Belle would answer.

The officials of the horse-car Company had noticed, through the eyes of their watchman, dim figures prowling about in the winter storage yard, and they had naturally thought that a band of tramps was using the cars as a refuge. Several extra watchmen were hired to put a stop to this outrage, and these men used often to see Belle and Amos meeting under the beech tree and disappearing again at once into the center of the yard. But they were clumsy men, making a great deal of noise as they moved about, and Belle and Amos had no difficulty in avoiding them. It was an added delight to hide and crawl under and double back on the trail, and there was a thrill in arriving safe, their pursuers eluded, at their own 756.

Several times, while Amos was holding Belle in his arms, lecturing passionately to her on the beauties of Virtue, he was stopped by the steps of the watchman on the gravel outside. All this had the pleasure of dangerous intrigue.

But the watchmen never discovered anything, and they were called off, after a time. The lovers, being rather bored with their meager topic of conversation, began, little by little, to seek further afield for their adventures. They wanted something more hazardous.

From time to time they had ventured to meet in broad daylight. These meetings increased in frequency, and even took them into Center Street, where they were, of course, in constant danger of being seen together. Indeed, several times they were actually identified by people who knew one or the other of them, but, as it happened, no word of this ever reached Phanor and Isabel.

One afternoon in August, they went to the theater, where they sat in a stuffy peanut-gallery, holding hands through a dozen stupid acts of vaudeville, and when they emerged again and started home, their way led them directly past the Mill. Perhaps it was later in the afternoon than they realized; perhaps Phanor was leaving his work earlier than usual; at any rate, just as they were passing the office door, he came out, and almost ran into them.

They stopped in their tracks, frozen with horror. Phanor, who was so thoroughly embarrassed that he hardly knew what he was doing, scowled darkly at them under the brim of his hat, and then, pretending not to have seen them, ran across the street and ducked out of sight behind a corner.

Belle and Amos stood for a moment whispering together, and then separated suddenly, taking opposite directions.

Now it had happened. There was no possible doubt that Amos had been seen, walking down Center Street with a girl, and no possible doubt of the consequences.

He set off, walking rapidly, but aimlessly, through

unfrequented streets, to try to gain time to think out a suitable plan of action. He was to go on trial; his whole life was to be put to the test. What should he do?

Belle was too obviously beautiful to allow of any misunderstanding of her function; if he had been seen with such a girl, he must be in love with her. He couldn't pretend to his father that she was a school-teacher, or some one whom he had met by chance. No; the secret was out.

Maybe his father would clap him on the shoulder and say, "Crickey, boy! She's wonderful! I never in my life saw such a . . ." This fancy showed Amos that he was plainly going crazy with worry, and he set about being more practical.

Well, he must get out of the scrape in some manner or other.

There seemed nothing for it but a complete confession. He would tell Phanor—well, perhaps that would be unnecessarily difficult—he would tell his mother, then, the whole story, from first to last: how he had met Belle, and had been caught by her beauty and her frankness to acknowledge love, and how he had loved her passionately and devotedly all these months—surely, they would believe that, now that they had seen her! They might be able to judge, he would say, of the violence and inevitability of his love when they learned of all the subterfuges he had been obliged to adopt to gain freedom to see her. He would tell them that there were, indeed, things about her that he did not

like, but that these things hadn't hurt him, and that he was doing his best to change them, in which task he had already made considerable progress. Finally, he would say that she had opened to him all the loveliness of life, which he had so far sought in vain, and would beg them to let him save his own soul, since he had discovered it by his own independence and action.

This, he thought, would make a case too strong for them to resist; he even fancied that they might be a little proud of him. He knew, of course, that they would not approve, but he knew, also, that though he was innocent, in a strict sense, they would believe him guilty, and might, conceivably, honor his own courage in daring to sow a few wild oats for himself.

The argument was going fairly well in his mind, and he was succeeding brilliantly with his parents, when he came face to face with a new actuality, and stopped short. He was in front of Burton's house. There was crape on the door.

For a moment he stood staring blankly. He would have given anything if he could have been transported to the other side of the earth; then he would have time to think out some adequate course while he was making his way back again.

His natural impulse was to rush in, find Burton, and assure him that he was understood, and was not alone. But he saw that the shades were tightly drawn at the parlor windows, and, knowing what that meant, he did not dare go up and ring the bell. He turned away

and started home, thinking that he could better face the situation he had prepared himself to meet than this which had come upon him so unexpectedly.

But as he turned the corner of the street and looked across the intervening yard at the back of Burton's house, he saw Burton himself, sitting on the steps. He stopped, and watched. Burton clenched his hands before him, and gazed into space; he stood up suddenly, took a few steps, and then returned and sat down again, sinking into a heap and covering his face with his hands. There was a world of sorrow in the gesture, and a pitiful confession of weakness.

Amos vaulted the fence, ran across the yard, and came up the path to where Burton was sitting.

"God bless you!" Burton cried, when he looked up and saw him. "You came! You didn't forget me!" He put his hands on Amos' shoulders and wept, quite openly, before him. "There isn't anybody in the world," he managed to say, "that I'd rather see at this moment."

"I . . . I wanted to tell you that . . . that you weren't alone," Amos said.

"Thank you," Burton said. "It's just what I need."

"I don't know what I can do; I can't say anything."

"It's all right; all right. You don't have to say anything. I'm glad you came; just glad. Sit down beside me here, and we'll talk."

Amos sat down. There was a pain in Burton's eyes

that he couldn't face. It was the worst thing he had ever seen; it made him afraid that nothing would ever come right again.

"It's hard to see the justice in this . . . this that's happened," Burton said, after a time. "Sometimes it seems as if God wasn't just. You understand?"

Amos nodded. He knew what he should feel if Belle should die. He wanted to tell of Belle, to pour out generously the happiness he had, and let Burton share it; he wanted, too, to say that he was in trouble himself. But this was impossible, under the circumstances. Burton, he supposed, had loved his wife; well, she had gone now, and he must manage to love what he could.

"Oh, God is cruel!" Burton cried suddenly. "What right had He? What right! To give, and then to take away! I've been tricked and cheated, by a God who steals!"

"Wait, now; wait," Amos said. "I don't think God did this. It's what you've often told me, yourself; when a man's in trouble . . ." He broke off, and then added, "Besides, there's all the rest of the world."

"It doesn't matter to me what's left," Burton said smiling, weakly.

"It does, though," Amos said. "It's got to."

"Oh, I know. I'm ashamed to talk so. But I've been desperate. I don't know what's going to become of me. I've had terrible thoughts. I'm not better than other men."

For some time they sat there, trying to talk; Amos

was dragged deeper and deeper, and found less and less to say. He had supposed that people were somehow lifted out of themselves, and exalted, in moments like these. But Burton was lowered; he had lost his grip, and was saying that he was not better than other men.

"It's helped me to see you," Burton said, getting up when Amos rose to leave him.

"I'm glad of that. I'm going to High School, you know, in the Fall. I'll come around, often, and we'll talk, like we used to. Good-by. Take care of yourself."

He climbed over the fence again. When he looked back, Burton waved his hand.

They never met again but once, in all their lives.

When Amos reached home, he looked fearfully into the parlor as he came through the hall. Phanor was not there. This was good news; it meant that the trouble had been turned over to Isabel for adjustment. Phanor was sulky and silent, and Isabel looked frightened.

Yet Phanor spoke first, to start matters.

"Well, where have you been?" he asked.

That was just like his father, Amos thought; to give him a chance to lie, if he wanted to. But he had decided to tell the truth.

"I've been to see Mr. Burton," he said. "Mrs. Burton's dead."

"Oh, what a pity! What a pity!" Isabel cried. "When did it happen?"

"I don't know," Amos answered, wondering what difference it made. "I've just come from there."

"Did you see Mr. Burton? He feels terribly, of course? "

Amos nodded. "He feels rotten. He's talking about being a bum; he says he hasn't got anything left to be good for."

Isabel looked shocked, but made an effort to get it out of her mind at once.

"Oh, I can't believe that," she said. "He's such a good man."

"He was, you mean," Amos corrected her. He had an idea that he might create the impression that there was a loosening of moral restraint going on all over the world; if this were true, his own sins might be taken more as a sign of the times.

During supper, Phanor and Isabel asked various questions, trying to grasp the reality of Burton's experience, but there was no more talk of his possible fall from Grace. Such subjects were better left alone. Also, so to speak, they didn't like to bring trouble to a funeral. But half an hour's talk sufficed for a tribute to Burton's grief, and as soon as the meal was finished, Isabel stirred up her courage, and began the inquisition.

"And where did you go this afternoon? " she asked.

"To the theater."

"Who with? "

Amos hesitated for a second. Should he tell now? No; later.

"I went with a girl," he said. This, in itself, would have caused an eruption, if they hadn't known more already.

"What girl?"

"Oh, a girl I know."

"But who was she?"

"What does it matter who she was?"

"Why, mother just asked! You're not ashamed of it, I hope."

"Of course not. What do you think I am?"

"Well, then, tell me who she was. I shouldn't mind a bit, you know, if it was a nice girl."

Amos hesitated again. This was rather too much like discussing Belle's character in public. The atmosphere wasn't very favorable for an enthusiastic confession, that was sure.

"Was it a nice girl?"

Phanor interrupted impatiently, rattling his paper.

"Why don't you answer your mother's question?" he asked.

"Well, I went with a girl by the name of Belle Brooke, if you want to know."

He had not imagined that the name, now that it was finally out, would mean anything to them. But it seemed otherwise.

"Belle Brooke!" Phanor and Isabel repeated it together, in tones of the utmost horror.

Isabel looked up at him, flushing in shame.

"Why, Amos Enday!" she exclaimed.

She could not possibly have been more shocked and humiliated, no matter what she had discovered.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to be seen in the street with a girl like that," Isabel said.

"Great God, boy!" cried Phanor. "Haven't you got any decency?"

"What's all the fuss about?" Amos demanded. "I guess I can walk down the street with a girl if I want to, can't I?"

"Not with that girl."

"What a blackguard you are, anyway!" Phanor put in. "Why can't you have a little self-respect?"

"Belle Brooke's not a proper girl for you to associate with," Isabel said, firmly. She evidently thought that she was telling Amos something, and that, having told it, there would be an end of the matter. But she could not bring herself to explain.

Phanor was not so reticent.

"Of all the low, vile, dirty . . ." he began.

"You're not being very polite, yourself," Amos cut in, angrily.

"Don't talk back," Isabel admonished him.

"Well, I don't see what right you've got to talk to me that way," he said. "After all, I did go to the theater with her, and I should think you'd . . ."

"There, don't drag me in, if you please," Isabel said.

"You came in yourself," Amos retorted. "I didn't ask you what you thought of my friends."

"I hope you don't call that girl one of your friends!"

"Why the devil don't you keep away from low associates!" Phanor said.

"Now, Phanor, be careful. The boy meant no harm. You didn't know, did you, Amos?"

Oh, let them go! Amos thought. They don't know what they're talking about!

He said, "No!"

"Well, let that end it, then," said Isabel, primly. "I shouldn't mind if it was a nice girl, but . . . I'm glad we warned you in time, before there was any harm done. We'll say no more about it."

This was getting out of it easier than Amos had expected. Why, he had not been obliged to fight for his life at all!

"And you're to keep away from her in the future, too!" Phanor said. "You hear?"

"Of course I hear," Amos answered. "What do you think?"

So it was over.

Amos was distressed to learn that Belle's reputation had spread so far. Oh, if she had only been more careful, how much simpler everything would have been! If only he could have told his story, as he had at first intended! Now, he would have to go on in the same old way, and his parent's knowledge of the situation added nothing. He had no thought of giving up; it was natural to accept love, when it was found, and make the rest of life conform to it.

He must be sure, however, that Belle was com-

pletely reformed, before there was any further discovery.

But further discovery followed immediately.

Amos did not see Belle all the next day. He kept in sight of his mother as much as possible, and noted that it seemed to reassure her.

But in the evening, when they were all sitting quietly at home, the bell rang, and Amos, prompted by some instinct, went to the door himself. There stood a mite of a child, whom he recognized as one of the family of mites who lived across the street from Belle; she handed up a closely folded note, and vanished into the darkness without a word.

Amos unfolded the paper, and read:

My dearest darling dear:

I can't give you up. Come to 756 quick when you get this and tell me all. I suppose they think . . .

There was another line, and then the initials, "B. B."

"Who was that?" Isabel asked, when Amos had returned to the sitting-room.

"Just somebody that wanted to know where the Fleetwoods lived," he said. "Just a kid."

He went back to his chair for a moment, and took up the book he had been reading, trying to think out a plan for escape. In a moment he had hit it, and without waiting for deliberation to spoil his acting, he jumped to his feet and said:

"Gee, I nearly forgot! I've got some books that

have got to go back to the library to-night! I'll have to go right up."

"Oh, you'd better wait till morning, I should think." Isabel said.

"No, then I'll have to pay a fine."

Before she could speak again he had found his cap, and was gone. The books, of course, went into the feed-box, and Amos, as hard as he could run, went to the car-yard, where Belle was waiting for him, tearful, frightened, adorable, thinking that she had lost him forever.

His excuse about the books, of course, had been thin enough, and he marvelled that it had succeeded so well. The next morning, however, it developed that he had dropped the note on the floor in the hall, in his haste and excitement, and that Isabel and Phanor had found it and read it.

There was the whole story. The "dearest darling dear" showed how far matters had gone. The "756" indicated a secret, and well-known, meeting place. Isabel saw clearly enough who were the "they" who were accused of being so ready to think evil, and with burning cheeks, she destroyed the note.

After breakfast, when Phanor had gone to the Mill, she took Amos "aside" for a "talk." So eager was she to discover that the whole thing was some hideous sort of mistake, that she actually accepted Amos' indignant denial of all knowledge of the matter, though the evidence had been in her own hands not ten hours before. He lied, and she believed him. She did not

care to ask him if he had really been to the library, because she was fearful of learning that he had not. She let fall a few vague hints and warnings, and dismissed him.

As the hours passed, however, she began to regret her timidity. Had she made it clear to him that he was surrounded by danger? Had she sufficiently punished him for his sin? She felt that she had not done these things, with true conscientiousness, but she hated to come back to a subject so humiliating.

The worst of all calamities had befallen. A low designing woman had caught her son. She saw ruin all about her, and Amos walking unconscious—for she still did not believe that he understood a word of what Belle had written—into the very center and deepest pit of it. The agonizing horror of that thought dragged her from the chair where she had been sitting, and sent her wandering restlessly around the room, clenching her hands, biting her lips, stopping, in sudden efforts at calmness, to rearrange the trivial articles on her bureau.

All her life, she had known that if certain things happened, ruin followed—no, not followed, but occurred as an immediate concurrent fact. She did not stop to consider how it was that, now that the worst had happened—or might have happened, for all she knew to the contrary—ruin was not present at all. If she had raised her eyes, she would have seen that “ruin” was nowhere in sight. But it was present in her mind; that was where the whole trouble was.

Should she plead with Amos, and try to show him his folly? She dared not do so; she might put thoughts in his head. Should she forbid him all contact with the world? She knew that this was impossible. If Amos had returned home—after what she would have called his “fall”—contrite and broken, with his shame on his soul, she could have forgiven him. But he had not run away; he was not contrite at all; his shame seemed not to have touched him; he asked no forgiveness. If only it hadn't happened! If only, as second best, it had been worse, so that she might take the simple and extreme measures that were prescribed!

She saw that she must discover more. When, that evening, Amos announced that he was going to the library, she put on her hat, as soon as the door had closed behind him, and, trumping up some excuse for Phanor, followed him. Under the windows of the magazine room there was a rack for bicycles; she climbed to the top of it, clutching the window-sill, and saw Amos seated shoulder to shoulder with his friend the old inventor, absorbed in a magazine. She went home happy and satisfied.

Serenity gradually and painfully accumulated. It was impossible to believe, for any very extended period, that reality existed. People passed up and down Elm Street, before the parlor windows; people were like that. What had the parlor to do with them? They might be wicked, or courageous; they might fail, or struggle; they might even, possibly, be people who saw

that life was what they themselves found it to be—but that was none of the parlor's business. Why, the parlor was established and completed; why all this fuss about adjustment to new conditions? Things happened, yes—that was lamentably true—but they happened outside, in the changing world, and the parlor need not concern itself with them. Life wasn't all beautifully systematic and orderly—there was no use denying it—but if people insisted on going their own way, up and down Elm Street—well, see what the result was!

No, no! The whole miserable affair simply was not true. Phanor and Isabel hoped so hard that it had not happened that it seemed not to have happened.

Within the week, however, it happened again.

"I'm going to the theater with Bert," Amos said. "That's all right, isn't it?"

"Why, certainly," Isabel told him. "I've no objection to your going with Bert."

"Well, you made such a fuss, the last time, that I thought I'd ask." He was guarding against her suspicions, not knowing that she had none left.

She saw to it that he had a clean handkerchief, and sent him off.

But about an hour after he had gone, the bell rang. Phanor went to the door himself. There stood Bert.

"Can Amos come up to the library with me?" Bert asked.

"Why, I thought he was with you already!" Phanor exclaimed, not having wit enough to hold his tongue. "He said you were going to the theater."

"Oh, well," Bert answered quickly. "There's been some mistake. I just thought we might go to the theater, if Amos had nothing else to do."

"Well, but see here . . . won't you come in?"

"No, thank you. I guess I'll run along."

And Bert, accordingly, ran along.

Of course, he went to the theater, in order to warn Amos of his danger, and waited outside the doors when the performance was finished, but he missed Belle and Amos in the crowd, and returned defeated. He made another attempt, and hung around the corner of Elm Street, still hoping to find them, but they had been in no hurry to return, and Bert had at last given it up, concluding that they had gone home by some other route, or that they had omitted the theater altogether.

In consequence, when Amos came in, Phanor was waiting for him in the parlor.

"Well, what does this mean?"

"What does what mean?"

"Where have you been?"

"To the theater with Bert, like I said I would."

"Oh, is that so?" Phanor said, sarcastically. "Then maybe you'll tell me how it happened that Bert was around here, after you left, asking where you were."

Amos thought: why didn't I have sense enough to tell Bert about it?

"Well, how about it?" Phanor asked. "You young liar!"

"I haven't got anything to say," Amos said. "If you don't want to believe me, you haven't got to."

"I should say not. You know perfectly well the whole story is a lie, from start to finish."

It occurred to Amos to retort, "Suit yourself. I'm a liar, if it's any comfort to you." But it seemed wiser, under the circumstances, to say, "Yes, sir," and he said it.

Then, while his father was stuttering and staring after him, he turned quickly and left the room.

Upstairs, Phanor and Isabel lay long awake and discussed the situation; it was a discussion which became a bitter argument.

"The boy's just a common damn liar," Phanor said.

"What a thing to say!"

"Humph! I don't see what else you could say about it! Tell me some cock and bull story, will he?"

"Do you suppose he went with that girl?"

"Of course he did! What's the reason he wanted to lie about it, if he wasn't doing something he was ashamed of?"

"Oh, isn't it terrible! The way that girl influences him! Blind infatuation just leads him on and on. He's not a bad boy; he don't mean to tell lies. But every time we find out something he has to . . ."

"What's the sense of saying a thing like that, Isabel? It's not the girl's fault, is it? He just hasn't got any truth in him."

"Why, of course it's the girl's fault. He wouldn't turn around and say things like that unless she put him up to it."

"Crickey, that's gratitude for you! All the expense I've been to to bring him up decently and give him an education, and he don't show the slightest appreciation of it! Young cub! "

"Now, Phanor, what's the good of saying that? "

"Good? Good? Lord's sake, woman, what are you talking about? Here I go and try to show the boy how to live a decent life, and keep him away from evil associates, and he runs straight off and picks out some low dirty Mick! And then, by God, he has to come home and lie to me about it! Try to tell me I'm a meddling old prig, will he? "

"Oh, to think how terrible it all is! " Isabel wailed.

"Now, there you go! What's the good of taking that attitude? The boy's just got to be made decent, that's all. Do you think I enjoy having it said that a son of mine is a good-for-nothing liar, running around with dirty Micks? Lord, I'm ashamed to hold up my head in the street! "

"Phanor! You don't mean to say people know about it? "

"I suppose they can put two and two together. What the boy can be thinking of, to bring disgrace on us, I can't see. Rotten, shiftless, nasty . . . "

"Couldn't something be done, Phanor? "

"Done? The boy needs a good talking to, that's what! "

"What good would that do? Don't you suppose he knows he's doing wrong, with all his up-bringing?"

"Humph! Goes in one ear and out the other. It's just wasting time to try to get him to see any decency."

"You don't think that, Phanor; you know you don't."

"Oh, don't I? I suppose you think the boy profits by the example that's given him? Is that it?"

"Oh, I don't know what to do, I'm sure!"

"I know, easy enough," Phanor said. "I'll put the boy in charge of the police; I'll get a probation officer to watch him. I'll see if he can go on defying me this way!"

"Phanor! You couldn't do such a thing!"

"Couldn't I, though? I'll report him to the police before I'm another day older."

"You'll bring disgrace on the boy."

"He's brought disgrace enough on us. I'll do it. My mind's made up."

"If you do that, Phanor," Isabel said, grimly, "I'll leave you."

Phanor reared up on his elbows in bed in the dark, and stared at the place where he knew Isabel to be.

"You don't mean that," he said.

"Yes, I do. Oh, Phanor . . ."

Phanor paused for some moments in thought.

"Well, I don't see what you propose," he said at last.

"I think we ought to take the girl in hand. We could appeal to her better nature. She could be made to give him up."

"Rubbish!" said Phanor.

He did not mean this exclamation to apply to the whole conversation, but they both seemed to feel that it did so.

Phanor did not appeal to the police, nor did Isabel appeal to the better nature of the evil influence, for, a few days after this, High School opened, and under this new interest in life, it seemed that the whole thing would blow over.

Isabel took back what she had said about leaving Phanor. It was merely a threat, anyway, and she never paused to consider whether or not she would have been willing to execute it.

CHAPTER IX

AMOS came to High School with a crowd of others who were equally ignorant of how to act. The blind lead the blind, gaily and without hesitation, and High School, in consequence, seemed actually sensible. It was governed by rules, of course, but the rules were formulated on a basis of expediency, rather than morality; the boys and girls were expected to be good because only so could they do their work, and not because being bad was a potential cause of ultimate damnation.

This was very gratifying to Amos. He attributed it to Belle, or rather, he attributed to her his own ability to appreciate it, for he had begun to think that school, and the world in general, would all along have been visible as quite a tolerable place to one who had had his perceptions quickened by a little experience. Belle herself decreased in importance; she had shown him that it was possible for him to travel his own road, and he had set out upon it; he passed her as he would have passed a milestone, and loved her only out of gratitude.

He went forward with enthusiasm. He thought it might even be true that he had a chance of avoiding failure in life, though this, perhaps, was expecting too much. His parents were no longer so insistent in telling him that he was no good; but this might be because


they were letting him "work out his own salvation"—they had frequently used this phrase—and get ahead as best he could. He knew well enough that he had taken a tremendous risk in attempting to decide life's values for himself. He had asserted his right to steer his own ship; this was all very well if he could make the voyage in safety, but if he finished on the rocks, he would have only himself to thank, and, he knew, he could expect no mercy from the Court which should consider his case.

So long as he remained in this conciliatory and indeterminate frame of mind, he worked hard, and brought home to his parents, at the end of his first month in school, a "creditable report." It was the first satisfactory report he had ever presented, and Phanor and Isabel made such a fuss over it, and were so endless in their praise, that he found their approbation harder to bear than their censure at his previous failures.

"I guess you may amount to something, after all," Phanor said.

"Oh, isn't it lovely," said Isabel, "not to have to worry!"

Amos resented this; he did not like to admit that a school report was so certain a measure of success; there was an element of surprise in his parents' attitude, too, as if he had suddenly shown evidences of hitherto unknown ability. As for not having to worry, the implied responsibility of being a reputable student was



worse than the risk involved in making his own evaluations.

Accordingly, during the second month he slackened his pace. He would be content with half the scholarship, if it could be attained with half the effort. He could find a better use for his time. His second report showed a falling off in every subject, and in Latin, he had gone below the danger point. He hated to bring this report home, but it seemed more normal, none the less.

"Good Lord, boy!" cried Phanor, in the old familiar way. "I should think you'd take some pride in your work!"

"I had a good report last time, didn't I? That shows I can do it, doesn't it?"

"What's the sense in saying a thing like that? It's no good being able to do it, is it, if you don't?"

"I don't see as it's so awfully important, anyway," Amos said. "So long as I don't get fired out of school, I don't see what you care."

"Oh, no, of course not!" Phanor said. "Sneak along, getting out of every obligation you can! Maybe you think you haven't got any duty to us; is that it? Crickey, I should think you'd like to show a little gratitude, once in a while! Maybe you'll realize, some day, how important your work is, that's all."

"Who's ever going to ask me what marks I got in school?"

"Oh, go on about your business, and stop being a fool!"

Isabel put the matter in a different light. Now that Amos had escaped, by some obscure process, inescapable ruin, it did seem too bad that something else must come up.

"What a shame," she said, "to make such a good beginning, and then fail again! "

"Oh, Gee, mother! I wish you wouldn't talk about failing all the time! "

"Well, that's what it amounts to, isn't it? "

"No, it isn't. I didn't fail to get a good report; I just didn't try."

"And what excuse have you got for not trying, I should like to know? What would your teachers say if you told them you didn't try? "

"Don't you suppose they can see I didn't try, as well as you can? "

"That's aside from the question. Your whole duty is to pay attention to your work, and you know it. You've been told so, times enough."

Well, here was the old idea of the "double life." It didn't offer a very satisfactory solution, but no other course seemed open.

On three afternoons a week, the entire freshman class came back to school for gymnasium.

"Enday," said Mr. Christensen, the Physical Director, one day, "You've got something that looks like a head on your shoulders. I wish you'd find out some way for me to run this class without calling the roll every day. It takes half the time."

"That's easy," Amos said. "All you've got to do is to put in a time clock, like they have in factories."

"Yes; and have all you fellows punching each other's cards! "

"Well, we can answer to each other's names in roll call, you know, if it comes to that. You can't keep people from cheating, you know, if they want to cheat."

"I guess that's right," said Mr. Christensen. "What shall I do then? "

"I should say," Amos answered, struck by a sudden idea, "that you could leave the roll call out altogether. You wouldn't miss anybody. This isn't Latin, you know."

"I couldn't do that. They'd say I didn't know how to run my classes."

"Well, I'll tell you. Call the roll once a month, or something like that, and don't tell anybody when you're going to do it. If you mix up the dates a little, they'll never find out."

"That's not a bad idea," Mr. Christensen agreed.

Amos forthwith worked out an elaborate formula for the days on which the roll should be called; Mr. Christensen accepted it, and put it into operation at once.

The plan worked well, especially for Amos, who was thus given, nearly every week, three clear afternoons with Belle.

Off to the Westward of the town there was a tract of woodland, sweeping over a hill, and in the center of it,

remote from all roads and secure from detection, Belle and Amos built themselves a house.

It was no more than a hut, with a frame of poles, thatched with pine branches and floored with balsam; it was fun to build it and improve it, and they enjoyed the ability to drop mysterious hints of their "secret meetings"—almost as if they were people in a book—but they used it infrequently, because they had so little use for it. Amos had constructed a fireplace of field stone, and from time to time they had actually managed to spend an entire afternoon in chilly seclusion, huddled up together beside the fire, telling each other fairy tales about being shipwrecked survivors, or lovers who had escaped the vigilance of the Court, with the penalty of the guillotine imposed on them if they should dare to meet. This was pleasant for a time, but they wanted something new.

They decided to break into the haunted house. There was a vast deserted mansion which stood near the railway yards, on a street which had once been respectable, but was now occupied by warehouses, except for this one forlorn and forgotten residence. A tall fence shut it off front and rear, and at the sides rose the bare blank walls of the warehouses; dead weeds rattled all winter long in the abandoned garden, and the sweeping carriage drive was carpeted by the fallen leaves of twenty Autumns. Years before, it was said, a terrible tragedy had occurred in the front room on the second story, a tragedy involving suicide and murder; the

street in which the house stood was always deserted after night-fall, and this seemed to give the color of truth to the legend. But no one had actually seen anything.

The plan was, to break through at one of the rear windows and visit the haunted house at midnight, or as late as possible. This would offer thrilling risks, no less from the chance of detection by passers-by or by prowling constables, than from resentment on the part of the restless spirits which drifted vaguely near the spot which had been their last home on earth.

On the night selected, Amos put on his old clothes, strapped a hunting knife about his waist, said he was going to the theater with Bert—this time, he had the foresight to mention it to Bert—and met Belle under the beech tree at the corner of the horse-car yard. They crossed the town by a devious route, and arrived before the great pile of the Darling House about nine o'clock. A freight-engine was shuffling about in the railway yards close at hand; the house was very still, and very dark.

Amos found a loose picket in the fence, and they squeezed through, and went up across the garden. At the back of the house, a kitchen window gazed blankly out at them; Amos climbed up on the water-table of the foundations, and reaching up with the handle of his knife, broke the center pane of the upper sash. The glass fell with a tinkle on the sill inside, and he reached through the opening and turned the lock.

Neither of them cared to go on with the adventure now—they were badly frightened, and had had adventure enough—but neither wanted to turn back.

They climbed in over the sill and stood breathlessly listening in the great dark kitchen. The broken glass crunched under their feet as they moved cautiously forward, and they heard the rustle of littered straw on the floor. They crossed the room, moving with infinite caution, and pushed open the swinging door of a black pantry, where they paused again for a moment, listening to the beating of their hearts.

The great hall, into which they emerged, was dim and lofty; a broad staircase reared itself up from the floor and was lost in the shadows above; a faint light glimmered through the fan-light above the door. They took a few steps forward again, though they knew in their hearts that they should never have the courage to mount that vast creaking stair that led to the haunted room.

Then, all at once, they felt the presence of some one.

Before them on the floor lay a long bundle of indefinite darkness; pale blotches of white indicated the face and hands of a man. He was lying stretched out at the foot of the paneling which formed the side of the stair.

Their hair rose, and they felt cold shivers pass over them.

Amos put his arm around Belle, and reached out, with his other hand, to feel the wall behind him. His fingers touched the knob of a door, which rattled,

tremblingly, and the figure on the floor stirred, moaned, and sat up quickly.

"Who's 'ere?" The voice was shrill and nervous. They could not speak nor move.

The figure got up unsteadily, staggered forward a few steps, and fell forward to its knees, putting up a hand to ward off the reeling floor. A strong stench of whiskey filled the air.

"Who's 'ere?" It was almost a shriek, now; tense and shaking; an inhuman cry. Yet there was a quality of familiarity about it, a quality terribly concealed, but recognizable.

The pale light from over the door shone on the swaying figure, the bent shoulders, the idly swinging arms, the face that peered eagerly into the darkness. It was Burton.

Amos stepped forward and caught his wrists, breathing deep in astonishment and relief.

"It's all right," he whispered. "It's me. It's Amos."

Burton clutched him, and dragged himself to his feet. His head was rolling from side to side, and he could not focus his eyes.

"Why! Whatchu doin' here?"

Amos turned for a second to Belle. "It's Burton," he said. "Remember? He's drunk."

Belle nodded.

"Quite, quite drunk," Burton said.

"Well, come out of here, you damn fool, you," Amos said. "We'll take you home."

"Don' wanna go home f'r anything."

"Yes, you do. How did you get in?"

"Secret passge—passge," Burton answered, knowingly. "Show you." He started shambling off down the hall, dragging Amos with him; then he caught sight of Belle, and stopped again. "Say, lis'n," he said. "Who's lady?"

"It's all right," Amos said. "She's going to help take you home. Let's see where you got in."

"All ri'; all ri'," Burton answered, reassuringly. "Mus' careful, an' keep very still, see?" And he began to sing.

Amos shut him up, and the three made their way out into the rear yard, through a musty laundry that opened off the kitchen. Together he and Belle got Burton poked through the fence, and started down the street, one on either side of him, supporting him, for his feet were loose and powerless, and he could scarcely manage to walk. Belle laughed immoderately, till Amos stopped her, at everything Burton said. At the corner a policeman eyed them suspiciously, but let them pass.

The restraint, and the walking, sobered Burton somewhat, and by the time they had reached his house he was coherent, sobbing and wailing and confessing his shame.

They went in, when Burton had found his keys, and Amos lighted the gas in the hall. A broken chair lay in the middle of the floor, the rugs had been kicked into corners, the pictures on the walls were knocked crooked,

and the window shades, broken and shredded, hung awry. In the study, books lay about everywhere, some with muddy footprints on their opened pages, the walls were stained and spattered, and a whiskey bottle, beside a dirty glass, stood on the desk.

"Now, listen here," Amos said. "This has got to stop. You're trying to go to the devil—I guess you've got a good start already. Well, you won't go. You'll turn around and come back. If you're man enough. You hear me? Are you man enough?"

Burton's eyes wandered to the bottle on the desk. "I don't know! I don't know!" he wailed. "You'll help me?"

Amos caught up the bottle and handed it to Belle.

"Here," he said. "Go out and pour that down the sink in the kitchen."

A moment afterwards he heard her choking in the kitchen, and when she returned to the study her eyes were filled with tears, and her cheeks were flushed. She had never tasted whiskey before.

"See here, my girl," Amos said. "You watch what you're doing."

He turned again to Burton, who sat in a limp heap, leaning his forehead on his hand.

"Help!" he cried. "You talk to me about help! Have you asked your Heavenly Father? Have you? Have you prayed to God to give you back the shield of Faith and the armor of Righteousness? You know what things are wrought by prayer. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son . . ."

He didn't believe a word of what he was saying, but the atmosphere of the study, even altered as it was, put words into his mouth. Then he saw that Burton was thinking only of keeping his grip, and he set out on a new line.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he said. "I'll come back to-morrow morning, early . . . have you got any more whiskey in the house? "

Burton buried his face in his arms and sobbed. "Oh, I'm a miserable sinner! " he wailed.

"You're worse than that; you're a fool. Have you got any more of that booze? "

Burton shook his head.

"Well, then; listen. I'm coming back here to-morrow morning. If this house isn't all cleaned up, and fixed the way it ought to be, and all this pig-pen chucked out of here, and you started out to live like a man, I swear I'll tell the whole story to everybody in Wilton."

"Oh, no! No! I can't bear any more! I can't face the disgrace of it! "

"The disgrace has happened now. You heard what I said. And I'll do it. Maybe I'll ask my father to get you a job in the Mill, or something. You've got to brace up, and be a man. You know what you'd do for me, if I was where you are now. You've always told me, if a man had anything left in him to appeal to, you can . . . but what's the sense in arguing with you? You don't know what I'm saying. I'll go. You set to

work on this." He waved his hand to include the room.

Burton raised his eyes, whimpering. His face was very pale and drawn. "You're not going to leave me alone?" he pleaded.

"Sure I am! Do you think I'm going to sit up with you all night, as if you were a sick baby? You've got to be a man. Nobody ever made a man of himself by drinking whiskey. That's the end of that. You mind what I say."

Burton begged and cried and whined, looking from Amos to Belle in pitiful appeal.

"No," Amos said. "You've got to do it alone. I don't care if it does take you all night. I'm not going to pity you." He caught Belle by the hand and drew her towards the door. "Come on, Princess," he said. "Let's get out of here."

As they parted at the corner of Elm Street, half an hour later, Amos looked seriously into her face.

"There!" he said. "You see what happens!"

At home, the gas was burning brightly in the parlor as he came up the steps, and his father, scowling darkly at him from the door, was waiting for him. It was nearly midnight.

"Don't scold me, Dad, for God's sake!" he cried, rushing in. And then, in desperate excitement, shivering at the thought of the awful significance which the story had for him, he told of Burton's collapse.

He lay long awake, staring at the ceiling. "You

see what happens," he had said to Belle. Yes. This was the result of deciding for yourself.

Sometime during the night Burton went away, leaving the gas burning in his study, and the door swinging idly open, and nobody in Wilton ever saw him again, or knew what became of him.

The Spring Term dragged along, and the end of the school year came in sight. Amos had forced himself towards an interest in his work; he studied more than he had ever done before, and his monthly reports improved. Phanor and Isabel were pleased—it was almost worth while, they thought, to ruin Burton, for the sake of the result on Amos—and the teachers were triumphant.

"Crickety," Phanor said. "Maybe you'll make a name for yourself!"

But Amos knew that no one was ever famous for High School reports.

"I always knew you could do it," his teachers told him.

True, it had not been difficult; a little patience and application. But none of Amos' teachers knew how afraid of failing he was, nor how the story of Burton had shown him his danger.

The moral of the story was this: as soon as one took a step away from the Old Code, away from safety and self-satisfaction, from the creed of letting the facts blow over, from the desperate hope for "the Approbation of One's Fellows"—as soon, in short, as one

turned away from the parlor—one was doomed. Burton had given up his training and his traditions, and had tried to face the world alone, as one man, rather than a member of a group; he had tried to fight life single-handed, instead of riding off on the back of the victory which his Clan had won, through generations; he had made his own valuations and put his trust in himself—and this was what happened. Life had been too much for him, and he had gone down. He was trampled into the mud of oblivion, and the world went marching on without him. That was Failure.

Amos had done these same things. Was it too late, now, to change? Had he seen his fate in time to avoid it? Was there still a way out for him? Well, he would bury himself in his school-work, and try.

But the pity of giving up! He could hardly endure the thought of turning his back on the romance and adventure which he had seen in life, the loveliness and the beauty of the world. Safety, really, meant nothing, and security was valueless; to win or lose was all one. He had but to ask himself the question, now that he saw the way to safety: what was his safety for? He would be safe from Failure—yes—but to what purpose? No; happiness lay in life, and life in happiness. It was this that it was a pity to give up.

He had once boasted that he could conquer life, even if it was hard—had he not been too filled with youthful enthusiasm?

He had sworn, by all that he held sacred, that he would never become the sort of man his father was—

well, but suppose he actually was that sort of man? Suppose he should take his chance, and live by his own faith—only to find that he was not man enough to carry through? The alternative was Failure, remember; he knew, now, what Failure was.

Should he take his chance?

This was the question which stood fixed and uncompromising in his mind, day and night, for long and weary months, while he was busy making peace offerings, in the form of good reports from school, to the Idol of the Approbation of One's Fellows.

About this time it happened that there was a family gathering at the Websters', and the entire Webster and Enday clan assembled for mutual stock-taking and fault finding.

Amos saw the fussy complaining of his Aunt Emily; he heard the bitter croaking of the esteemed Edna Enday; he heard Grandma Webster beaming on misery and calling it virtue; he watched the mumbling and pottering of old Grandpa Webster, who talked about printing and wondered what the world was coming to.

It was evident that the whole momentum of the Enday ancestry was driving life along the straight and narrow path that avoided both the hills and the valleys. They were moving forward stubbornly and relentlessly—it was almost like a charge. And Amos himself was in the line of march. They were putting the torch in his hands and urging him on.

"I'm certainly in a devil of a fix!" he thought.

"Now, Phanor," Isabel said, one evening when Amos had gone out. "I want to have a serious talk."

"What's the matter now?" asked Phanor, putting his paper down across his knees.

"It's about Amos."

"I thought so. What's he been up to?"

"It isn't that. I think he's really taken a brace, just as we hoped he would, some day. I think he bids fair to amount to something. His reports are better and better, all the time. Miss Weeks told me, only yesterday, that there wasn't a better or brighter boy in any of her classes."

"What are you driving at?"

"Well, you know the terrible trouble he got himself into last summer. And if you want to know my opinion, I think it was our fault."

"Our fault!" Phanor shouted in amazement.

"Yes."

"But Good Lord, what's got into you? Are you crazy? How can you turn around and say a thing like that?"

"I'm not crazy at all. If you'd listen a minute, instead of flying off on a tantrum, I'll tell you."

"Well, go ahead. I've been waiting for you to stop beating about the bush."

"The reason Amos got into trouble with that Brooke girl was because he didn't have anything to do. He was idle all summer. Satan finds work . . ."

"What a ridiculous thing to say, Isabel! Didn't we do everything we could to help him, I should like to

know? I'd like to hear what else you think we could have done! "

"We could have kept him busy."

"Doing what, for Heaven's sake? He didn't have any school."

"I know. That's just it. I'll tell you: I think he ought to have a job in the Mill this summer."

"A job in the Mill! " Phanor cried.

"Yes."

"Doing what? What the devil do you suppose there is for him to do at the Mill? I suppose you think he can take my place. Is that it? "

"No, you stupid, I don't think anything of the kind. But there are lots of boys working in the Mill—in the shops, and around."

"Running machines? You want the boy to ruin his lungs, I can see that! "

"No, now listen. Phanor . . ."

"Oh, put him in the dyeing-room, I suppose, and have him breathing steam all day. No, thanks! "

"Well, he could work in the shipping room, or something."

"And associate with that dirty gang of Micks? Lord, woman, haven't you got any sense? "

"You worked in the shipping room when you started in, you know you did. It didn't hurt you any, did it? "

"Well, I was older than he is, and besides, the boys in the shipping room aren't what they used to be in my day."

"Pshaw, I guess you've forgotten the stories you used to tell. How about Sam What's-his-name?"

"Oh, he was an exception, I guess," Phanor said.

"Well, probably there are exceptions now. But I think it won't do Amos a bit of harm, and it would avoid the experience we had with him last summer. I think he's learned his lesson. And it will be nice for him to earn a little money of his own, too."

"Humph! He won't get rich on what the Mill will pay him, that's sure."

"Of course not. But it would be a little something, wouldn't it? I think he'd enjoy it. And I certainly don't want to go through another summer like the last."

"I suppose it wouldn't be a bad idea to let him find out how people earn money," Phanor said, grimly.

He was thinking back, in his memory, to the time when he had been learning the business from the bottom. He had had a hard time, in those days. But see what it had done for him! Of course, just having a hard time wasn't the only thing that had caused his success—he had applied himself. Lord, how time did fly!

"Then will you see about it?"

"I don't know. It wouldn't do any harm to look into it, I suppose."

"Well, school will be over in three weeks, you know."

"Now, I'll tell you one thing, once for all," Phanor

complained. I'm not going to rush into this thing without taking time to think about it a little. There are a good many points to be considered."

After worrying about it for a few days—though he did not take the trouble to consider the various "points" involved—Phanor spoke to the shipping man, who said he thought he might be able to make room for Amos. As soon as he heard this, Phanor was sorry, and apprehensive. A boy ought to know so much about life, in order to be safe. And Amos was no more than a baby. Why, when he had worked in the shipping room he knew almost, if not quite, three times what Amos knew!

Amos received the news with mingled, or rather with alternating, emotions. He was glad of the chance to see what the Mill was like, and he was eager to spend a season in the enemy's country, looking over the ground, to see if he could manage to make a tolerable existence of it. Yet, in certain moods, he thought that to go into the Mill was a concession of principles. Once in, he was lost. Once he had taken a job in the Mill, his dream of being somebody was forever vanished.

A few days before the announcement that he was to be flung in, like experimental powder in a test-tube of acid, he had an experience that changed the color of his thoughts, and sent him to the shipping room, when he finally went, as a man goes to be beheaded.

He was waiting after school for Bert. The bright

sunlight was beating down on the sidewalk, reflected up on the cool stone vault of the entrance vestibule; he stood back, gazing at a curved gargoyle that leered down from a corbel above his head, thinking, despairingly, that it would perhaps be better to give up, and play safe, when he heard a step in the corridor, and saw a girl come out of one of the class-rooms and make for the door.

She saw him standing there, and looked up. He was sure he had never seen her before, and yet she was familiar to him. It was if they had met somewhere, long ago, and remembered dimly . . . She went down the steps, and he watched the sunlight shining on her white dress.

She wasn't much. She certainly was not pretty. He could not imagine loving such a girl. Yet she had golden hair and frank eyes, and she had noticed him. Moreover, there was a nice look about her; she seemed to have stepped out of some serene and virtuous place. All at once, a thousand thoughts rushed in upon him. This girl, even by what she lacked, suggested possibilities of all the things which other people, somewhere, did not lack. In books, or at the other end of the world, somewhere, there were people who thought what he thought, who had the same dreams and hopes and delights. Somewhere, his own people were waiting for him to find them. Somewhere . . . and he was being asked to go into the Mill, and forget that these radiant beings ever existed!

It was impossible to do that. He couldn't. He

would go into the Mill, because it would create a great fuss if he should try to withdraw, but never, as long as he had a pound of strength for a struggle, or could draw a breath for a shout of defiance, would he give up, and play safe. He would take his chance.

It was worth it. He could stand the thought of Failure, now—the penalty was terrible, but the rewards were great—and he would take his chance. His own people, waiting somewhere, expected it.

It took so great a faith to believe that his own people really existed! There in Wilton, with the Mill and the parlor . . . and he had never, in all his life, seen a single person who proved that life was beautiful . . .

Then Bert came, and they went to play base-ball in Philip Roger's yard.

The shipping room did not produce exactly the result that Phanor and Isabel had expected.

They had thought that it would keep Amos completely occupied, every minute of the day. If a boy were not safe from idleness, there in the very heart of the Mill, then there would be no safety anywhere. Whenever the superintendent of the shipping room came in, the men and boys were hard at work nailing covers on the boxes, and it never occurred to him that this was not the normal and constant state of affairs. As soon as his back was turned, they loafed, smoking and telling stories, and keeping only one eye on the door. The superintendent of the shipping room never knew this, and, in consequence, Phanor never knew it.

They had thought too, that the shipping room would show Amos what life was like. Phanor thought that life was a matter of sticking to your job, minding your p's and q's, and earning the praise of your boss, and he hoped that Amos was learning this. Amos thought that life was an opportunity to achieve something—the precise nature of your achievement depending on what you found within yourself worthy of expression—and the boss and the job merely a means to an end, to be carefully watched lest they conflict with the main purpose. And the shipping room convinced him that this was a defensible interpretation.

They had thought, lastly, that he would learn to appreciate the value of money, now that he was seeing how it was earned. They themselves rated money very high in the scheme of things—always taking care that it should not become a master, which meant that they must not love money to such an extent that the pursuit of it should impair their earning power. They had preserved Amos' first pay-envelope, much as they would have preserved a decoration from some mighty Emperor, if they had had one. True enough, Amos enjoyed having some money, but he spent a great deal of time wondering when, if ever, he should have enough to enable him to retire. Manifestly, it was absurd to think that any one would ever pay him for doing something that he liked to do.

Still, this was thinking rather far ahead. He had before him all the rest of High School, and the whole of college. The real test had not yet come. And it

could not come until it was almost, if not quite, too late to do anything about it.

This test he imagined somewhat as follows: a Tribunal of Successful Men would be seated on a dais, in their robes of office—pongee coats, he supposed, the elbows frayed from much leaning over ledgers, and pens behind their ears—these men would examine him, spreading out his mind, much as one spreads mortar out on the top of a wall, to determine his attainments and attributes; everything he had ever thought or done would be revealed—his dearest visions would be rejected, probably, as unsuitable, and picked daintily out of the mortar. The Chairman of the Tribunal would have a file of his school reports, ready at hand. If he passed the tests—which at times seemed possible, and at other times not so possible—the Chairman would jerk his thumb over his shoulder and cry “Mill!” Then the superintendent of the shipping room, or Phanor, would lead him away and put him on a high stool, where he would settle down, and begin life. The Tribunal would shout “Next!” and Isabel, who had been weeping softly in the back of the room, would be relieved and delighted, and would kiss him when he got home at night.

He might refuse to go before the Tribunal. This would kick up a greater rumpus than anything he had ever done. Nevertheless, he might refuse to be tested.

The thought of his own sort of people kept coming before his mind, tormenting him. They would all pass the windows of the tribunal chamber together, and look

in, and see the candidates being spread out and examined and hustled off to their respective careers, and they would smile and say "Poor Devils!"—or, possibly, something more adequate—and glance at one another in an understanding way, and go on to do something interesting.

Or, he might be a failure. Then his own people would say, "No, you cannot come with us." He would drift about, an uneasy ghost; he would flatten his nose against the windows of the parlor, on rainy nights, and look in at the happy home that might have been his if he had paid attention and realized the importance of his work.

Besides Amos, there were five men and boys in the shipping room: two of these were older, and married; they always needed shaves, and they smoked black pipes and talked about rich men, and told each other of the fishing trips they had taken twenty years before. The other three were gay young blades who cracked jokes and swore; on Saturday nights they dressed up and loafed about the store doors on Center Street, looking at the girls and singing in harmony.

Amos was punctual in leaving home for the Mill, after breakfast; at lunch time, he pretended to be worried about his work; at night he sat around the house with an air of importance that made his father choke. From time to time he went to the library, to read the magazines or talk with his friend the inventor, and three or four times he arranged to see Belle.

Belle was no longer able to offer any inspiration:

some day, he supposed, they would run away together, and live in Paris. In some distant and exotic place, life with Belle would be wonderful.

He worked along from day to day, seeing that he would be fairly content if only he could forget that he did not belong where he was. But he could not forget.

CHAPTER X

THE winter which followed was a continuation of the unhappiness and dissatisfaction of the summer. Amos had tried the Mill, and the prospect of spending the rest of his precious days there filled him with horror. As for the rest of life—that part which he always now thought of as “the other side”—he had nothing but hope. He went on, because he saw no good way to stop, being carried by the momentum of past experience.

His work in school went fairly well, but that is the most that could be said of it. He was trying, again, to effect a compromise. A great opportunity might come—though he could not guess whence it would come, or what would be the nature of it—and, if he did not keep himself open and ready for it, he might find himself unable to grasp it, or, even, to see it at all.

If there had been any one to say to him, kindly and quietly, so as not to frighten him: “See here, young man; you’ve come to an age where you must make up your mind what course to follow. Either you must be content with the plan your father and mother have laid down for you, or you must break definitely away, and have nothing more to do with them, and travel alone.” If then the archangel—for it could not be any one of less estate than this—could have gone on to

explain the difficulties and rewards of each course, he might have been able to avoid the hateful necessity of compromise. But there was no one to say this to him, archangel or otherwise. Burton had been a failure, and a rather tragic one; Belle saw nothing beyond her own bodily existence; his parents thought that there was only one side to the question.

Phanor and Isabel saw that he was unhappy and listless, but they could not guess the reason for it, nor think what to do about it, until Isabel had an idea, and made a suggestion.

"What are your plans for next summer, Phanor?" she asked.

"Plans? Plans? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, just what I say."

"I don't know that I have any plans, special. Why do you make that assumption?"

"Well, we have a little money laid by, you know."

Phanor rattled his paper. He saw his recent raise in salary taken away from him, and spent on foolishness.

"And you want to find some way to chuck it away—is that it?"

"You know I don't want any such thing, Phanor."

"Well, you talk like it."

"No. I've been thinking. It seems to me Amos' last summer, in the shipping room, wasn't exactly successful."

"Humph! It wasn't my idea, in the first place."

"It don't matter whose idea it was. The question is, do you want to repeat it?"

"Crickey, Isabel, I never saw anybody like you for stirring up trouble! What are you getting at?"

"We haven't had a real vacation since we were married, that's all. And I think it would be nice if we should take Amos and go away somewhere. It would do you good, and it would be just the thing for Amos."

Phanor sat stunned for a moment.

"Where do you think the money's coming from?" he asked.

"You know perfectly well we can afford it."

"I don't know anything of the kind! What's the sense of saying a thing like that? You seem to think I'm a millionaire. A summer vacation!"

"It wouldn't cost much, really, when you come to figure it out. We'd have a hotel bill to pay, and it wouldn't come to much more, in the end, than we spend at home."

"Rubbish! Trying to tell me it's just as cheap to go to some swell summer resort as it is to stay at home. What are you talking about?"

This point being reached, they talked about it for three-quarters of an hour, moving in circles, like animals tethered in a field, who wind themselves tightly up to the center.

A few weeks later, however, the subject came up again.

"I met Mrs. Thingum-jig this afternoon," Isabel said. "You know, Phanor . . . Mrs. Who's-this . . ."

"Oh, you mean Mrs. Popperdingle?" Phanor said, laughing. "No, who did you see?"

"It beats everything how I can't think of the woman's . . . Oh, yes, Mrs. Collins."

"You did, hey? What's she up to?"

"She was telling me about the place they went for their summer vacations to."

"Lord, are you still harping on that?"

"Well, I think it would be lovely. You know how you'd enjoy it."

"Humph! There's lots of things I'd enjoy. When it comes to paying the bills, though, I don't enjoy it so much."

"I hate to have everybody going off but us."

Phanor scowled as this weak point was touched.

"Where is this place she was talking about?" he asked.

"It's called Lakeside Lodge, and it's in the White Mountains."

"In the White Mountains!" Phanor cried. "Crickey, woman, do you know what it'll cost?"

"The Collinses paid eight dollars a week, and she thinks they'd make it less for Amos."

"Can't be much of a place, at that figure."

"That's what she told me she paid. Why wouldn't it be a good idea to write and find out?"

"Now, don't be in such a stew over it. Why go ahead and commit yourself? The place might be full of rotten dirty Micks, for all you know."

"Mrs. Collins said there were nice people there. And you wouldn't be committing yourself just to write and ask for the rates, you goose."

"Yes, but you can't tell how the old duffer will take it."

"What old duffer?"

"Oh, the hotel man. I've seen that sort of thing happen before."

In the end, it was decided to spend two weeks at Lakeside Lodge, in the White Mountains.

Isabel told Amos that if he did well in school, perhaps they'd take him off on a vacation somewhere.

"Gee, I'd like that!" Amos cried. "I've never really been away from home in my whole life!"

For three months in succession he brought home good reports, and then discovered that the vacation was all arranged, no matter what happened. In consequence, the next three months were not so good.

Lakeside Lodge, and Cottages, stood far back in the woods, a mile from the railway station, and half a mile from the lake. It was a large brown bandbox of a house, with a mansard roof on which the pointed slates were arranged in patterns, and it was conspicuous for its porch with Egyptian columns—now badly split by the weather—and the crop of lightning-rods which sprang its chimneys and gables. A button manufacturer had built it, to provide himself "a stunning place in the country, near a lake," and then, in the course of years, his wealth increasing, so that he was above his house, or decreasing, so that his house was above him, he had abandoned it to the Misses Cadwallader, who had seen an opportunity, and had opened

a summer hotel. It showed above the tree tops for miles around, and seemed to have been dropped there by a cyclone, so little did it fit its position.

Near it stood the "Cottages," a pitiful shanty, done up in Art Stains, and falling to pieces because of dry rot in the joists.

Thither came Mrs. and Mr. Phanor Enday, and their son, Amos, arriving in a canopy-top buckboard, drawn by a wheezing white horse.

The inmates of the lodge were as follows: There was a business man and his wife, who had been coming for years, and were the star boarders; two bachelors, fond of fishing—one of these men owned a sawmill somewhere, and the other traveled about the country in a buggy, selling Family Atlases and whiskey; a sharp-faced widow named Smalls, who was wearing herself ever thinner in the attempt to keep her small son in order; a pallid young man who walked in the woods, even when it was raining, and "did" water-colors; three meager and empty-headed young women—the two stout ones were engaged in the task of instructing the Youth, and the thin one lived in the hope of something on an allowance from her father; a farmer named Winterbourne, with his wife and daughter; and a young medical student, who had just finished his internship, and was going to be resident physician at a boy's school. Mr. and Mrs. Collins did not come.


Besides these, there were some others, who were paid to be there: the Misses Cadwallader, who ran the

hotel, and, as an avocation, made burnt-wood souvenirs of Mahocket Lake; Harry, the stable-man; and two frowsy girls, local "Help," who made the beds and waited on table, and shuffled about all day long in shoes with the heels worn down.

Phanor and Isabel were very much pleased. Phanor was greatly relieved to arrive; he had had a hard day, shutting up the house at home, which now seemed so far away, and worrying about the trunk and the journey, which had involved two harrowing changes of trains; he leaned out of the buckboard, as they came up the sandy road, and expressed deep gratitude that Lakeside Lodge actually existed. He had begun to be afraid that he had been led into a hoax.

Isabel saw at once that the air was good, and she found no reason to complain about the beds and the arrangements in the rooms. She was a little frightened by the loneliness that settled down over the place when it began to get dark; when she came downstairs she found a cheerful fire in the Social Room, and two of the young ladies playing Halma before it, and she set about getting acquainted at once.

After supper, Amos went down the road on an expedition of exploration. The woods on either hand were different from the woods near Wilton; they were darker, and had a primeval air about them, as if they had not been traversed since the Indians left; they were, in short, "trackless forests." He felt rather timid, alone in the darkness, and kept in the middle of



the road, walking softly, so as not to arouse the wild beasts, which, for all he knew to the contrary, were sitting impatiently behind every stump.

The road led him down to the shore of the lake, and he stood for a long time looking out over the still black water, watching the fading light in the sky and the reflections of the tree tops and the stars in the wavering ripples at his feet. A flock of crows across the lake were squabbling about the best place to spend the night; their noise accentuated the general quiet; he had never known that the world could be so still. He fell to thinking of Belle, and wondering what she was doing.

Probably, if she had been able to share with him all his apprehensions about life, so that she had been able to be a sort of spiritual mistress to him, his loneliness would have been greater than he could bear. But she was not, and he was only comfortably lonely.

Even if he couldn't have borne it, what could he have done? He couldn't turn about and run off home to her, now that his parents had been to all the trouble of getting a room for him. An old thought came back to him: how did the wonderful people in books, who eloped with those they loved, manage about the rooms and the baggage and the hotel bills?

Well, he was there now, and he would have to stay, whether he could bear it or not.

When he reached the house again, he was surprised to find his father and mother in conversation with Mr.

and Mrs. Winterbourne. Isabel called him over to the fireside and introduced him.

"This is Mr. and Mrs. Winterbourne," she said, and then, turning to them, with a touch of pride, he thought, she added, "This is my son."

Amos shook hands and said that he was happy to meet them. Mr. Winterbourne was a pleasant man, with a kindly smile, and his wife was the very picture of friendliness and hospitality.

Mr. Winterbourne said, "I suppose you're going to like it first rate here, young man? "

"Yes, sir; I think so," Amos said.

"Have you seen the lake yet? " Mrs. Winterbourne asked.

"I've just been down to look at it."

"It's lovely, isn't it? I always say there isn't a prettier sheet of water in the world than Mahocket Lake."

As Amos went off upstairs to bed, he was thinking that he liked the Winterbournes. Though he did not see what they were going to be able to do to help him, the thought that they were in the world somehow reassured him, and made more tolerable the lonely minutes before he went to sleep.

In the morning, he was ready for breakfast before his father and mother had come down, and, not daring to go into the dining-room without them, he stepped out onto the porch, and stood admiring the fresh aspect

of the landscape. Over the woods was visible the rounded crest of a symmetrical hill, which he had not noticed before, and he was gazing at it and wondering if it would be possible to climb to the top of it and look down on the other side, when he heard a step behind him and turned to see Mrs. Winterbourne and her daughter.

The girl was the girl he had seen in the corridor at High School.

"This is my daughter Constance," Mrs. Winterbourne said. "Constance, this is Mr. Enday."

As Amos took her hand he looked up at her, to see if she would show him some recognition of their former meeting, but she dropped her eyes timidly, as if she had been caught in possession of a secret.

"I was just thinking I'd like to climb that hill over there," he said. "Wouldn't you like to come too?"

Constance smiled brightly, and looked up at her mother.

"Oh! Could I, Mother?" she asked.

Mrs. Winterbourne laughed, and said that she had no objection. Then she took Constance away with her to breakfast, whither Amos followed, sitting over at his own table across the room.

Whenever he found opportunity, he looked at Constance. She had some strange quality about her, which he could not name. As before, she gave him the impression of having come from some friendly and satisfying place. She gave him a feeling of contentment.

And he had asked her to go to the top of the hill with

him! "You'd better look out," he told himself, "or you'll be getting into something."

Then Phanor and Isabel came in, and he set about the congenial and familiar task of concealing his thoughts from them.

"You've never been here before, have you?" Constance asked, as soon as they were started on their walk.

"Never have," he admitted. "I've been too busy to go to places, much."

Constance looked sympathetic.

"And don't you just love it?"

"Yes. The lake is fine."

"My goodness, have you been down to the lake already? Isn't it just the loveliest thing you ever saw?"

"It made me feel sad."

"It did? I don't see how it could."

"Well," Amos admitted mysteriously, "I guess that was something inside of me, and not the lake's fault."


Constance looked sympathetic again.

"I was down there last night, after dark," he added.

"In the dark! My, I'd be scared!"

Amos smiled indulgently. "Of what?" he asked. "You don't think there's wild animals there, do you?"

"Oh, not really. But I get scared at night. I'm an awful 'fraid-cat. Once I got scared just coming over from the cottage. I just sat down on the grass and screamed for father. He had to come out and get me. We just roared."



"I know. You get like that, sometimes, in the dark. You can't keep any control of yourself; you know there's nothing to hurt you, but you're scared, and you can't help it."

Constance seemed somewhat surprised that Amos should be brave enough to confess his own cowardice.

"That's just what it was with me," she said.

"Once I went into a haunted house and found a dead man on the floor," Amos said.

"Oh, my gracious! Weren't you just scared stiff? "

"Well, I didn't know he was going to be there, that's true."

"I'd have just died."

Amos thought it wise to change the subject.

"Say, what were you doing down there at Wilton High School that day? " he asked.

"At Wilton High? " said Constance, wonderingly.

"Oh, I went there to take exams once."

"I thought I saw you."

"You saw me? Did you go to Wilton High? "

"Why, yes; I thought you remembered. I was standing in the door, waiting for somebody, and you came out and went down the steps."

"It must have been when I was taking exams," Constance said serenely.

Amos was thinking how strange it was that some people would tell lies, just for the sake of telling them; it was a very different thing from simply making up a good story, for the story's sake.

"Well," he went on, "did you take the exams? "

"Yes, and I flunked them, every single one. I was trying to get in. Father wanted me to take them again, but I wouldn't."

"But why did you have to take exams at all? I never did."

"Oh, you went to school in Wilton, and that's different. You see, I don't live in Wilton."

"Oh. Where do you live? "

"In Shrewsbury."

"I know where it is. Do you go to the Institute? "

"Yes. I'm just starting my third year, and I was dying to go to Wilton."

"But why? "

"Oh, I don't know. You see, father's a farmer, and we just live in the country, and I never go anywhere."

"Well, you can take my word for it that you can't see the wide world from Wilton," Amos laughed.

"Well, but . . . I don't know."

The road led them into a hollow and across a strip of swampy land, thick with trees. Walking in the wheel-ruts, through the high grass and weeds, they emerged at last into an open field which rose from under their feet in one unbroken sweep to the crest of the hill. The wind was rippling the grass, rushing up the slope, like notes of music.

"Come on! " Amos cried. "Let's run! "

He set out, shouting, looking back over his shoulder from time to time, expecting to see Constance drop back. But she kept close behind him, working hard, but with obvious enjoyment. At the top he stopped,

and she, arriving beside him, sank down on the grass, spreading out her hands to support herself, looking up at him through her windblown hair with bright eyes and flushed cheeks.

He thought it strange that he should suddenly find her pretty.

Across the valley and hills lay, rolling like waves of the sea, green pastures and dark woods and squares of brown plowed land; on the farthest horizon the big range reared up, faint and blue, into the sky. A white farm-house shone out at intervals, and a silver river meandered lazily down the valley, seeking its outlet to the distant ocean. What faith a river had, Amos thought, to go on hunting and hunting, when its sea was nowhere in sight!

"This is great!" he said. "It's like the hills in England!"

"Oh!" gasped Constance, thrilled. "Have you been in England?"

"Well, I never have. But I know it as well as if I'd been born there. I had it all fixed up to go, one time, and the plans fell through at the last moment."

"My goodness! I'd be afraid to go to England."

"Afraid of what?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's so far away, and you have to cross the ocean, and everything. I'd be afraid I wouldn't ever get back."

"Well, what would be the harm if you didn't? Gee, I'd love to go off somewhere, and live! Wouldn't you?"

"I never thought."

"Maybe you will, some day."

"Me! Oh, I should say not! "

"But why shouldn't you, if you want to? "

"Oh, I never could go to England."

At this, they fell silent.

After a time, they heard the sound of the first luncheon bell, and as they rose to return, Amos found himself bitterly resentful that they must go down on the same side of the hill they had come up. It was always like that.

"I'll tell you," he said. "Let's come up here often. We'll make this a place of our own. Would you like to do that? "

"I don't see what you want a place of your own for," Constance said. "What could you do with it? "

That wasn't what he had said, or meant. What did she have to go and pretend for? As if she couldn't see! She needn't begin to give herself airs.

But before they had reached the Lodge this feeling had drifted from him, and they were talking happily again.

It was the first of a series of walks of exploration, extending over all the country side. It was always Amos who proposed them, and Constance always readily accepted. She was always willing and eager to go—and, after they had gone, she seemed not to care whether they had gone or not.

He began to like her. He tried, often, to reach her real self, to see what she was, actually. But she met

him with a protecting wall: her pretense of not understanding. What was she afraid of? Why must she hold herself so remote?

Phanor and Isabel remarked the growing intimacy, and seemed delighted. Mr. Winterbourne, too, seemed interested, and often jokingly asked Amos what romances he had been telling the girl. And, almost at the end of the vacation, Isabel said suddenly, after a long period of silence:

"Constance Winterbourne's a real nice girl, don't you think so? "

"Why, yes," said Amos.


Then four days went by without a letter from Belle.

Letters came at noon. Amos had always been able to find the delivered mail before his mother did, and sneak Belle's letter out of the pile on the mantel in the Social Hall; as the days went by, now, with no letter for him, he began to fear that his mother had managed to get ahead of him, and had stepped in to prevent the progress of events. But her questions about Constance removed his suspicions; she would never have asked if he didn't think Constance a nice girl, if she had been worrying about Belle.

Then, the day before they left, the letter came:

DARLINGEST DEAR:

I have been sick, and they won't let me out of bed. I am writing this under the bedclothes, and the nurse thinks I'm asleep. I don't know if I can get out by the time you



come, dear, but I'll try to if I can. Waddy found out about 756, so meet me at the House in the Woods. Good-by, dear, and don't forget I love you, dear.

Love and kisses and everything,

B. B.

This was the letter that Isabel found in Amos' bag when she went into his room to pack his things for departure. She snatched it up and read it, replaced it, and ran trembling to Phanor with the terrible news.

"Oh, Phanor! It's still going on! I just found a letter from that girl, in Amos' bag. What shall we do? "

"What girl? " Phanor asked.

"Why, that Brooke creature."

"Oh, pshaw! " said Phanor, with deep concern.

"Lord, hasn't the boy any decent instincts? "

"I did so hope everything was all right, at last. It may have been going on all the time; think of all the times he's been out, and we never knew where! Oh, and there's Constance! "

"Damn the boy! I wonder why he don't behave! Where is he? "

"He's out somewhere with Constance. I did hope he was interested in her. I thought he'd forgotten all about this other."

"I'll have it out with him! " Phanor snarled, savagely. "I'll see if he can go on defying me this way! "

"That's not a bit of use, Phanor. We tried that before."

"Well, what are you going to do? You stand there and talk, but you haven't got anything to suggest. That's ridiculous, Isabel."

"Ought I to burn the letter, do you think?"

"What did it say?"

"Oh, I couldn't repeat it!"

"Of all the low, dirty, vile . . ."

"Oh, but she must have some good in her! Don't you suppose we could . . . the boy's just infatuated."

"Young scoundrel!"

"Phanor, don't you think we could induce her to give him up?"

"What an idiotic idea, Isabel! What's the sense in saying a thing like that?"

"Well, there's no other way out of it, that I can see. I can't believe he's a bad boy; it's just because he's got into the clutches of this girl. Don't you suppose she knows she's dragging him down to ruin?"

"How do I know what she knows?"

"Well, she's got to be told. She ought to have a good talking-to, that's what I think."

"Who's going to tell her that, I'd like to know?"

"I thought you would."

"Me!" Phanor cried.

"Yes," said Isabel, determinedly.

"But, Good Lord, I never set eyes on the girl!"

"What if you didn't? Oh, how can you hesitate when the boy's whole life is at stake! It must stop! It must! He don't realize what the consequences might be."

"By God, I'd like to thrash him! "

"It would be a lot more use if you went and saw the girl. I wish you would, Phanor. Please, as soon as we get home. Just tell her that she's dragging the boy down. She must see that the whole thing's impossible."

"Seems to me that's a woman's place, not mine."

"No. What could I say? You're a man of the world; she'd have to listen to you."

"There might be something in that," Phanor assented.

"Of course there is. Do, Phanor! Please! "

"I don't see what I could say to her, though."

"Just tell her that she's dragging the boy down, and appeal to her better nature."

Phanor didn't actually see himself talking with Belle; if he had done so, he would never have consented to it, even to have his life, or Amos'. But it seemed a long distance ahead; he thought of himself only as a man of the world, with ability to handle the situation. A few grand phrases came into his mind . . . the evil influences and the threat of ruin faded away before them.

"Well, I might see what could be done," he said.

Isabel went on with her packing. Phanor sat and thought. With all he had to put up with . . . and now this!

When Amos returned from his walk with Constance, he saw that his bag had been packed, and suspected that his bundle of letters had been found. But Isabel

made no reference to it; she knew that there would be no more evil, as soon as Phanor had had time to appeal to Belle; moreover, she didn't want an interview with Amos.

The morning of the departure arrived. Isabel was seated in the buckboard; Phanor was standing near, watching Harry load the trunk on the rack at the rear; the Misses Cadwallader were on the porch, to say good-by and utter a hope for future patronage; the majority of the guests made a smiling group of spectators. Amos, right before them all—"Damned young hypocrit!" muttered Phanor—was talking to Constance.

"You get off at Shrewsbury," Constance was saying, "and go right straight up the main road. Our house is the seventh on the left hand side, if you don't count the blacksmith's shop. You can tell it by the big trees in front, and the stone well."

"I hope I can come often," Amos answered.

He took her hand for a moment, and then went the rounds of them all, smilingly saying good-by, while Phanor, sitting in the buckboard, watched him darkly. Lord, what he had to go through with for that boy!

Amos scrambled in beside Harry, and they moved off.

"Good-by, all," Isabel called.

She dug Phanor in the ribs, and he raised his hat.

Mrs. Winterbourne, standing with her arm through her husband's, smiled benignly.

Then they turned the corner. Phanor began to worry about the trains and the trunk and the terrible errand he had set for him at the end of the journey;

Isabel looked about her, and said good-by to the hills and the wild flowers beside the road; Amos was wondering if he would really care to see Constance when he had once more returned to a world where Belle was.

CHAPTER XI

ON his arrival at home, Phanor set about opening the house. This consisted in unlocking all the doors and windows and making sure that they were not stuck; turning on the gas and water; poking a stick into the drains, to see that all was clear; getting out the silver, which had been lying hidden in the bottom of a barrel of remnants of wall-paper in the attic; airing out the cellar; and notifying the police that there was no longer any need of special surveillance at 97 Elm Street.

He always spent a great deal of time on these things, but on this occasion he dragged them out to fill the greater part of the afternoon, because, as soon as he had finished, he was to call on Belle Brooke, and appeal to her better nature.

He dreaded it. Now that he was back in Wilton, it seemed terribly real. He saw himself confronting her, tongue-tied and miserable; he had never before appealed to any one's better nature, and he did not know how to do it. He even tried to put it off till "some day next week," but Isabel would not hear of this, of course, and packed him off.

She went to the parlor to wave to him, but he had no heart to look back, and plodded along, gloomy and

silent, hoping that he was not as conspicuous as he felt, and trying to think of something to say.

When he came within sight of the Brookes' house, he stopped, and prayed that the earth might swallow him until after supper. He walked up and down several times, telling himself that he was not sure of the number; that it was rather late for his errand; that Belle might not be at home. In his heart, he knew that he was afraid.

Amos had helped about the house as long as there was need of him, but he managed to slip away in time to reach the library before four o'clock.

He crossed the town, and set out into the country. It was very hot and still, and the sun was low, filling the woods with red light and casting his shadow on the road before him.

Belle was no longer the only girl in the world; there was Constance. But the two did not conflict. Belle had love and romance and beauty; she offered an interpretation of life, warped and one-sided as it was. Constance had nothing—nothing actual, that is—she was a mortal maiden, simply, who had been put in Amos' path as a substitute for evil, and she had the charm of availability. He did not love her, and he did not want to win her; she had nothing to win. She was merely another girl.

Why had his father looked so blackly at him while they had been saying good-by, there at Lakeside Lodge? Was it because he had heard them planning


to meet again? Did he mistrust her? Couldn't he see that Constance was a case of criminal negligence—that she was guilty of tedious innocence, and as safe as a lump of clay? Why, Constance would grow up into just such another woman as Isabel; was his father unwilling that he should have even that?

By this time he had turned off the road, and had reached the house in the woods. It was a ruin now; the roof had collapsed, and the needles had withered and fallen from the thatch that formed its walls. He sat down on a log, staring at the hut. Happiness had fled from it; it was no more than a brush-pile, and a desolate one at that; the fireplace, where they had so often watched the flames, was a heap of stones. He sighed, and gave himself over to melancholy.

He waited for half an hour. Belle didn't come. He went down to the road again, looking eagerly about him, hoping to catch sight of her at the end of each vista as it opened up before him.

She had been used to hiding from him, sometimes, and making him find her. He stopped, feeling that perhaps she was watching him, and said something that might make her laugh and thus betray herself. But his voice sounded echoless and dismal in the quiet woods, and he was silent again.

He made sudden rushes at the thickets, parting the leaves with his hands, thinking to see her, each time, crouching in the bushes, laughing roguishly at him, springing up to come running to him, holding out her



arms. But he soon gave up this play, because he found nothing.

He stepped out into the road and looked down the hill towards town, but the eager little figure was not in sight. He waited, fixing his eyes on the farthest visible point, but no one came.

He returned to the hut and sat down again on the log, looking at the spot where she had been sitting when they had last visited the House in the Woods together. Her corner by the fire was empty now, as his heart was. The birds were singing, as they had been singing on that first evening, when he had gone out into the yard to hide his diploma—how long ago it seemed! The sun was going down behind the hills, filling the world with the sadness and beauty of the twilight.

What could have happened? Had she not gotten his letter? Had she been unable to escape from those who watched her? Was she too weak—his heart seemed to stop, and the woods became dim before his eyes—was she dead?

The thought brought him to his feet, and sent him hurrying down the road towards town. He knew that he was being foolish—yet, how splendid and sad a thought! She had died; she had gone out of the world, and he, who loved her, had been left behind, in a vague world of twilight which should nevermore be lifted from his spirit. She had crossed to the other shore, and he would wait for his call to go and join

her there. The poets and Sunday School helped him, and he was finely miserable.

When he came to the corner of Arbor Avenue, however, though he was already late for supper, he could not resist the temptation to go and stand for a moment near her house. There would be lights in the windows, perhaps; he would see all the familiar things with which he associated her—the garden with the poplar trees, the shrubs beside the grass-plot, the red barn—perhaps he would even catch a glimpse of her. Then he would know that she was safe, and he would go away alone, but comforted, into the night.

He stopped beside the fence on the opposite side of the street, and stood looking at the house.

It was the same spot where Phanor had paused in embarrassment, an hour before.

Phanor had finally shaken off his cowardice, and made a rush; he was on the steps almost before he realized what he had done. It would soon be over, anyway.

Had he rung the bell? Lord, yes! It was too late to run, now! He saw nothing before him nor about him; he simply stood staring at the glimmer of light that came through the stained glass of the door, hoping desperately that no one would answer his ring.

Then the door suddenly opened, and his mind went blank.

“I’d like . . . is there . . . does Miss Belle

Brooke live here? ” he stammered out, to the maid who stood silently watching him.

“ Miss Belle died very suddenly last night, sir, ” said the maid.

“ Oh! ” said Phanor. “ No matter! It’s of no consequence! ”

He turned and scuttled down the steps.

“ Hell and damnation! ” he muttered. “ The girl’s made a fool of me! ”

Amos lingered for a time, and then, being unable to endure the inactivity, came nearer, and realized the situation, almost at once. Without knowing how he had gotten there, he found himself at the kitchen door, looking in at Annie, who was quietly at work.

She looked up and saw him.

“ God save us, here’s Mr. Amos! ” she said. She stood there, holding a pan in her hand.

“ It’s true, so it is, and Glory be to God, ” she went on, answering the question she saw in his eyes. “ The poor thing died last night; close onto midnight it was, and the lot of us sitting up praying for her soul, and not sleeping a wink since then, either, God knows it. Only the day before yesterday I was talking to her, and we thought she was getting better. She wrote you a letter, and I took it out myself and posted it. She made me promise I’d never tell it, and I never did, to a living soul, and them was the last words I ever heard her speak. ”

Amos came faltering into the kitchen, and put out his hand on her arm. "Oh, Annie!" he said.

"It's an awful thing," she said. "Would you like to see her, Mr. Amos?"

He tried to say "No," but could not.

Annie led the way through the house. In the parlor, under the dim light of the gas, which was turned low, the casket lay on trestles; the dark wood shone, and the straps and handles gleamed and glittered; there were flowers about. The upper part of the lid had been taken off, and stood on end beside the casket.

Annie made the sign of the cross, and moved slowly forward; Amos reluctantly followed, keeping his eyes fixed on the edge of the coffin, into which he could not yet see. He moved unsteadily along at Annie's side, clutching her arm, watching the edge of the coffin.

Then they came near enough to enable him to see into the hollow, and he saw Belle's face. At once he became conscious of himself; he felt himself standing there in the parlor; he felt all the rest of the world; he seemed to know what every one was doing; he understood Annie, there at his side; everything suddenly became real.

"No," he said.

He moved backward towards the door, keeping his eyes fixed on the casket. He could see nothing but a few sharp glints of light on the bright metal work—nothing else in the dark room.

The door clicked behind him, and the world slowly faded away again, leaving him bewildered. He nodded

his head quickly to Annie, freed his hand from hers, opened the door, and ran down the steps.

He turned towards home, but it was long before he reached it. As he walked, he kept repeating, "It's over, it's over, it's over," monotonously and mechanically, in time to his footsteps.

For a time he was terrified, feeling something always close at his back. Then he was hard and despairing, glaring around him, defying life to do its worst. Then he saw the long progression of the years that were to come, and felt himself moving through them, hopeless and weary of living. "It's over, it's over." He wondered why he did not weep. He marveled that he did not break into a run, trying to get away.

He saw a man approaching; when he came close, he reached out his hand, and caught the man's sleeve.

"Excuse me," he said. "I've just suffered a great loss."

The man started and stared and passed on, muttering something that Amos could not hear.

So she had gone away, like the lovely lady in the book, and had left her lover, broken-hearted, a shattered ruin of what had once been a man, staring grimly and dry-eyed down the darkened vista of the long and hopeless years. No hope was any longer visible; hope had died.

He paced the corridors of his deserted home, so empty and cheerless now; he stood on the terrace, looking down across the garden which once she made

more lovely; here she had stood, on such a day; here she had smiled; at the corner of yonder wall she had once given him a favor to wear for her in the battle to which he went. The cypress trees stood dark against the starry sky. The garden seemed to miss her, and the flowers hung down their heads. His horse seemed to know that some blow had fallen, and his dog came whimpering to lick his hand. "No, Roland, no; she will never ride with us again in the forest, following the merry huntsman's horn; we shall never hear her laugh again, as she used to laugh in the twilight beside the garden pool. Aye, turn to that door, old friend—you will never hear her step again."

As he went through Elm Street, he saw a bright light in the dining-room; they were having supper without him. Well, he could not go in. He could not go to them to ask for help. If his father should ask him where he had been till this time of night; if his mother should look sorrowfully at him, and accuse him of being a bad and inconsiderate boy—would his trouble not descend on him the more heavily? If, when he told them what had happened, they should laugh at him, and tell him to find something to occupy his mind, would he not hate them? And then he would be alone indeed. No, he could not go in.

As he wandered past so many houses, watching the cheerful lights in the windows, he suddenly realized that Belle no longer existed; she was not in the world. In the imaginary griefs, in the former love quarrels, he could put an end to unhappiness, when he had had

enough of it, by going to her to make it up; but now he could not make it up; she had gone away forever.

But at last he wore himself out. He must go somewhere. He distrusted home, and knew that it could not offer anything that touched reality, even remotely; but he must go somewhere, and home was the only place he knew.

He entered the sitting-room, blinking in the strong light. Phanor sat reading his paper, and did not even lift his eyes; Isabel rose silently from her chair and went to the kitchen to get his supper, which she had been keeping hot for him.

They were in no mood to speak to him. Thank God, they were going to let him alone.

"I guess he knows about it," Isabel said, as soon as Amos had finished his supper and gone up to bed.

"He knows about it, fast enough. Where else could he have been till this time of night?"

"I can't help feeling sorry for the poor boy. Do you suppose he feels it much?"

"Of course he don't!" said Phanor indignantly. "The boy's so heedless and irresponsible."

"Well, he's not given to telling how he feels. I've been surprised, sometimes."

"I suppose so." Phanor meant to imply that Isabel would be surprised at anything. "Why, a boy of that age don't know what it is to feel things, as you call it."

"Well, I don't know. I can't help feeling sorry. I wish there was something I could do to make it easier for him."

"Rubbish! What's the need of that? He's got out of the scrape a lot easier than anybody could have expected."

"Well, of course. But it's too bad it had to happen like this, just the same."

"Humph! Maybe we'll have a little peace, now. I was getting pretty sick of it."

"If only it don't depress him awfully."

"Depress him! Crickey, it's too bad about him! No, he'll get over it soon enough, never you fear."

"I hope so. I'd be so ashamed to have people see him moping around, and connect it with this. If people should guess the whole story, I don't know what I'd do."

Phanor was thinking that worse things might happen than that; suppose people should hear that he had been up there, standing on the damn doorsteps, like a great silly, asking for somebody that was dead! What then! Lord, as if he didn't have enough to put up with!

"Well, I suppose we're well out of it," Isabel said. "Maybe he'll get interested in Constance, now."

"Who's Constance, for Heaven's sake? "

"Why, you know: Constance Winterbourne, that was at the Lodge. They seemed to get on so well together."

"What's the sense in that? Crickey, hasn't the boy got anything else to do besides running after some girl all the time? "

"Nonsense, Phanor! It's perfectly natural for him to be interested in the girls."

"At his age! "

"You were yourself, you know you were."

"What's the sense in saying a thing like that, Isabel? The discussion's not about me, is it? "

"Well, but you said . . ."

"Oh, leave me out of it, will you? I simply suggested that he was too young to be running after some good-for-nothing girl all the time, and you go and try and make out that I was always frittering away my time when I was a boy. That's ridiculous, Isabel."

"Constance isn't a good-for-nothing girl."

"What's she got to do with it? "

"Why, I thought he was interested in her, that's all. She's such a nice girl. I had a long talk with Mrs. Winterbourne about it. I'm sure she'd be delighted if they were to—well, to make a go of it."

"I suppose she would," Phanor growled. "She'll get somebody to run after her daughter, trust her! Schemer! "

"Why, Phanor! I should think you'd be glad. It's the best possible thing to keep him out of mischief, you know it is."

"Crickey, I wonder why the boy hasn't got any self-respect! Always running around with low associates! "

"Constance is an awfully nice girl."

"Oh, keep quiet, will you? "

Isabel accordingly kept quiet, for some time.

She watched Amos carefully, hoping that he would show evidence of interest in Constance, and fearing, at the same time, that his sorrow at Belle's death would be obvious, and so cause a scandal in the neighborhood. It never entered her mind that Amos would no more think of revealing sorrow at Belle's death than of revealing interest in Constance. She would have been happy to be taken into his confidence—now that it couldn't do any harm—and couldn't understand why she was not.

Phanor, of course, did not watch at all. There had been an evil influence in life; this influence was now dead—Lord, he guessed he knew it, seeing how he had been humiliated in finding it out!—and there was no excuse for life's not becoming normal again. When things were all right, they didn't need watching.

Amos spent a good deal of time alone, reading poetry. "Oh, death in life, the days that are no more!" "The touch of a vanished hand, the sound of a voice that is still!" These phrases did not exactly apply to the case in hand, but they came near enough; there was a fine and passionate sadness about them. He knew that memory is the only friend a heart bowed down can call its own, but, strangely enough, he soon got over the memory stage, and began to look with increasing hope towards the future. He struggled against this, but it got the better of him; he altered his attitude, and thought that decency and orthodoxy demanded that he pretend hopelessness and grief, even

if he did not feel them. He told Bert that he thought the greatest line in English Literature was, "Dear as remembered kisses after death." "At least," he added, "it is to me."

When school began again, it was easier to be sad. He had, in the past, made much of his secret and dashing intrigue; well, it was over now. He dropped vague hints to this effect, taking care that every one should know that his love was dead, and had not merely given him the mitten. He imagined his friends saying, "There goes poor old Enday. God, how that man has suffered!" Later, when it was harder to keep up the pretense, he dropped it, with elaborate effort. Then people said, "The strength and courage of that man is beyond belief!"

He went out to Shrewsbury, several times, to see Constance, taking care that his mother should not know of it, telling himself that she would make a fuss about it if she knew. He knew that this was not true, but there was no romance in a case where one's mother knew all about it. Besides, she would say that she was delighted, and that would steal away the greater part of the charm. Besides, again, what had his mother ever done that he should let her share his life?

Constance lived on a farm. On the occasion of his first visit, she had showed him over the place, and they looked at the animals and wandered through the orchard and down the road to the little red school-house which Constance had attended as a child. He tried,

more earnestly than ever, to discover some meaning in her, to meet her real self, because he now felt free to do so, and felt some need of her; but he found, as before, that she was reluctant to reveal herself, and drew back, timidly, before every attack. This constituted something of a challenge.

His second visit was made in the winter, and they sat primly in the parlor, before the stove, and talked.

The Winterbourne's parlor was a sedate and quiet room, filled with memorials of the past, as if the family were a part of some museum exhibit to illustrate former greatness. The atmosphere of antiquity seemed to indicate that life was now over and done with.

Two windows looked out towards the road in front; a third, its small panes brightly polished, afforded a vista down through the orchard. This orchard window must have been one of the most delightful places in the world; one felt that happy people had sat there, in times long gone, with apples on the window sill and a gay fire dancing on the hearth. But no one sat there now; the fireplace had been bricked up, to keep out mice, and it was more delightful, and more prudent, to keep near the stove.

Above the mantel hung great-great-grandfather's saber, with which he had chopped people in half in some war that was now actually in the history books—a tarnished reminder of the days when men took life in their hands and did something with it. On the shelf stood great-aunt Abbie's hour-glass; it marked the time for a hundred years, and would have continued to do so.

had there been any descendant with energy enough to turn it over. The tall and tottering secretary had belonged to grandfather Douglas, and was filled with his books, which were now never read; he had written his Memoirs at that desk—and a very interesting book it would have made, too, except that it remained in manuscript, which time had made almost illegible.

On the wall hung Uncle Ebenezer's portrait; a stern old boy, who glared out over his poke collar as if to ask what the devil all these strangers were doing here; he looked as if things had gone wrong, and would continue to go wrong, and no one could say he hadn't predicted it.

As a link between these souvenirs and more modern times, there was a cabinet of mounted butterflies; the fact of this collection's existence expressed modernity, but the insects themselves were falling to pieces, and no one was quite ancestral enough to care for them, nor quite modern enough to throw them away.

In the center of the room stood a quartered oak table with glued-on ornaments. It held a pair of snuffers on a tin tray, a photograph album, upholstered in yellow plush, with a heart-shaped mirror on the cover, a bronze inkstand, deeply corroded, made in the general shape of a battleship, and a box, lined with red satin, and covered on the outside with small shells, arranged in patterns. The lamp was of china, with a brass base; on its shade a group of dark brown and pin-headed swallows chased one another round and round with crazy zeal.

Between the front windows hung a cuckoo clock, which had never run since the hornets built a nest in it. In the corner was a black-walnut what-not, filled with diminutive animals, cast in lead, a mother-of-pearl pincushion boat, and a greasy-looking statuette of a Dutch cheese-vendor, made of soap.

The stove was a vast and glittering machine, poking itself out into the room; it stood on a square of embossed zinc, and behind it was a wood-box and a galvanized coal hod and shovel. There was never a fire in it except when Constance had callers.

The door which led from the hall to the parlor was protected by a portiere of elongated porcelain beads, which clanked like icicles whenever it was drawn aside to allow any one to enter.

Amos felt that something must be done to break up this organization, or the world would go to hell within a week.

"I don't suppose I ought to tell you this, Constance," he said, as they sat before the stove. "But I want you to know."

"Don't tell me if you don't want to," Constance said. "What is it?"

"Well, once I knew a girl. She wasn't what you'd call a proper girl; I don't suppose a lady would speak to her, but she's stuck by me in places where a lady would have left me to my fate. She was very beautiful, and I loved her."

He paused, and looked over to watch the effect on Constance, who saw what was coming, and sat silent.

"You must understand," he went on. "I had been living along, day by day, in the ordinary way—Oh, I know what it is to feel a limitation of the spirit! I know what it is to be shut in in a world too narrow! My father and mother—well, I kept finding things that I wanted to know about, and they wouldn't tell me."

"I don't see what you mean," said Constance.

"No," said Amos, "you wouldn't."

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Constance, turning to him quickly.

Amos altered his meaning promptly.

"I mean, your parents weren't like that."

He knew that this was not true. All parents were like that; parents owned their children, and as soon as you owned a person, you were through with understanding.

"Well, I met this girl," he went on. "Beatrice, her name was. And the world was a different place, afterwards. She made the sun shine, she put the stars in the sky; she was the birds singing, and the wind blowing over the meadows, and . . . and I read lots of poetry."

"I should say you had!" Constance exclaimed.

"Oh, I thought I could tell you, but I can't. It was love, don't you see? And I guess you can't tell about love."

Constance was silent.

"And then," Amos continued, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, "Then she died."

"That was too bad," said Constance severely.

It was Amos' turn to be silent.

"I don't see what you told me that for," Constance said.

"I thought it was interesting."

"Did you think it would interest me?"

A sudden thought flashed through Amos mind. "This is bad!" he told himself. "The girl's offended; that must mean . . ." He dared not finish the thought.

"I'll have to be going along," he said. "I've got to be home early to-night. I'll have to take the early train."

"You've got loads of time," Constance assured him. "It's almost half an hour."

"Well, I don't want to take any chances to-night. There's a special reason."

When Constance came with him to the door, he turned suddenly to her, apprehensive and distrustful, but curious.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," he said. "You didn't like my telling you that, did you?"

"Mercy! Why should I mind?" said Constance lightly.

Amos left.

Oh, yes; of course! Why should she mind? She did mind, though. Did she think he had told her something improper? She wasn't any better than all the rest of them; as soon as something out of the ordinary happened, she had to go and pretend it was awful! Couldn't she be interested in anything? Did

she have to relate everything to herself? That's what she had done. Lord, was she one of these "Thou shalt not have any other girls before me" people? What nonsense! Did she fancy he loved her? Silly little snippet!

He scowled and thought profanity all the way home in the train. Crazy little kid, getting offended at a thing like that! Well, she'd see. He was through with her.

In a few days, however, Constance wrote him a polite and friendly letter, inviting him to the Saint Valentine's Day Dance. This was the most significant and important of the social events at the Shrewsbury Institute; the fact that she had asked him to come to it meant that she had forgiven him, and that she wanted him back again. That was all right. Let her beg a little; it wouldn't hurt her.

He put the letter on the floor of his room, conspicuous in the center of the rug. Isabel found it, as he had expected, picked it up, and put it on his table, where he found it when he returned.

"Mother," he said, going into the sewing-room where she was at work. "I've got to go out to the Washington's Birthday Dance with Constance."

"Oh, how lovely!" Isabel exclaimed. "Have you got a clean shirt to wear?"

"So you didn't read that letter, after all," he said.

"What letter?"

"Oh, the letter from Constance. It's for Saint Valentine's Day, not Washington's birthday."

"I'm not a bit suspicious about your correspondence with Constance; not the slightest particle," Isabel said. "Of course I didn't read it."

"I was just wondering if you were honest only when you weren't suspicious," Amos said.

As he turned to leave the room, he saw his mother hang her head, and he was sorry for what he had done.

The day of the dance duly came, and Amos went out to Shrewsbury to attend.

Nothing happened. That is to say, it was the usual brilliant occasion, and every one enjoyed it. Constance wore a new and pretty dress, and Amos told her so; she beamed on him, and everything became serene again. Not that she thrilled him; she didn't belong at a dance, anyway; she belonged at home.

"Let her stay there, then," thought Amos.

On the way home, he decided, quite simply, to run away.

It was a difficult thing to run away, evidently. More people would do it, if it were easy. But he thought he could manage it. He should have to keep his courage up, for a week or two, until the danger of capture was passed, and until he had gotten started in his new life. Then, they would write and ask him to come back, probably. Well, they could write all they pleased. He would reply: "I am happy and prosperous here; why should I return? I have all that I need. You must manage to get along without me." Then he would give

the letter to his Japanese servant to post, and would think no more of it.

He set his escape for the following Friday. He made no preparations, for fear of arousing suspicion. He didn't need much, anyway: just some money, and a few books. He would go to Italy, where he might sit and watch the sun sink into the water, or see the moonlight shimmering on the roofs of the houses. He would stay long enough to become a great and rich man, and then, perhaps, come back.

But suppose he did not become famous—or even rich? There was a chance of it. Indeed, as he thought it over, it seemed probable. He had always been good for nothing in school, and in all the relations to practical life; his father and mother had told him, often enough, that he had no better than an even chance, anyway, and perhaps not quite so much as that; he did not really believe them, but they had proof on their side, and he had none on his. After all, perhaps most people—Phanor and Isabel excepted—had dreams and hopes as valid as his own, but most of them either failed, or were too prudent to try. Would it not be foolish to take the desperate chance, when there was no real need of it? Why, he might be a failure of the worst possible sort—that is, a failure who had run away from home for that special purpose.

But how would his father and mother feel? They would crow, of course, and say, "Now see!" No, that wouldn't do.


Isabel would look back on the years of his babyhood, and think of all the ambitions she had had for her son. Phanor would go down to the Mill, humiliated and ashamed, avoiding his friends for fear of being questioned. Isabel wouldn't dare face Mrs. Fleetwood or Mrs. Wilson; Phanor would meet Mr. Winterbourne, when they went to the lodge—they would, perhaps, be going to the lodge then—and Mr. Winterbourne would ask Phanor whatever became of that son of his. The other boys would all be successful, with homes of their own; they would sit around and shake their heads over him, and say that it was a pity for him to turn out a failure, when he had had such a good start.

Friday came and went, and Amos stayed.

There was at school a woman named Herrick, who taught freehand drawing to such of the pupils as were thought eligible—that is, pupils who were so solidly normal and inartistic that they could be trusted among the dangers and temptations of the "studio." Miss Herrick's "studio" was a rambling room with a skylight, partitioned off from the rest of the garret of the school. It was, of course, forbidden to all the girls and boys who did not take freehand drawing.

Amos, on one occasion when he was wandering through the corridors looking for something to relieve his boredom, passed along the top floor, and hearing a slight rustling noise in the studio, stopped at the open door to investigate.

He saw Miss Herrick bending down before a cupboard in the corner; she rummaged in the depths of



the shelves, took out a bottle, from which she took a long drink, and which she then replaced. She wiped her mouth on the back of her hand, took a cautious look about her, though without seeing Amos, and went out of the studio by another door.

Amos entered at once, as soon as Miss Herrick had had time to get to a safe distance, and pried into the cupboard.

One of the other teachers, knowing very well that Amos had no business on the top floor, and scenting some mischief, had followed him, and paused in the studio door in time to see him on his knees before the cupboard in the corner, holding a bottle of whiskey in his hand. The teacher had collared him, and lead him off downstairs to the Principal's office.

He concocted a fanciful yarn about how it happened that he had been caught thus red-handed, but he made no mention of having seen Miss Herrick—if the old fool wanted a nip of whiskey, and couldn't get it in any other way, he wasn't going to tell on her.

"I am appalled at this story," said Mr. Hill, the Principal.

He wrote a note to Phanor, explaining the matter, and suggesting that Amos was not a fit boy to retain as a pupil in a school which had always taken pride in its moral tone, and remarking that Phanor would, no doubt, agree with him as to the proper course to take.

"Amos, Amos!" wailed Isabel. "How could you do such a terrible thing!"

"I didn't do anything, I tell you. It wasn't my

whiskey. What would I want with a bottle of whiskey, anyway? I should think you'd have more sense than to ask me a thing like that! "

"But what were you doing there in the first place? You knew you had no business in the studio, didn't you? It's the most shameful thing I ever heard of. And whiskey, too! "

"I guess maybe it was Miss Herrick's whiskey," Amos suggested.

"There you go, you dirty blackguard! " Phanor shouted. "What in hell do you mean by saying a thing like that about one of your teachers! Tell me that, will you! I'm damned if I ever . . ."

"Phanor! Phanor! " cried Isabel.

"What are we going to do with you? " Phanor said. "You'll have to be sent somewhere to school, won't you? Unless maybe you want to be a hod carrier! My God! I'd look pretty, wouldn't I? "

Amos had an impulse to pounce on Phanor and thrash him. But he thought of the endless trouble this would cause, and resisted the temptation.

"All right," he said. "You can take me out of school for this, if you want to. Go ahead and fire me. I won't stay around here to bother you. And you'll get fooled, just the same, because I haven't done anything."

"Oh, is that so? " Phanor retorted. "I suppose Mr. Hill's letter is made up out of whole cloth, is that it? He's a liar, too, I suppose, according to you? "

"Oh, I don't believe he's really a liar," Amos said, easily. "He'll know more than he does, some day."

“ Oh, for God’s sake, go to bed, or somewhere, and shut your fool mouth! I’m sick of you! ”

After Amos had gone, Isabel took Phanor to task for his language and his temper, and Phanor said:

“ Oh, I give up! I don’t know what to do! It’s just one thing after another. He keeps getting into scrapes, and choosing low associates, and when I try to reason with him he talks like an idiot. Think of the disgrace of having to take him out of school. Oh, damnation! I can’t bear it! ”

However, within the week Miss Herrick discovered the trouble she had caused, and, to free Amos from blame, she confessed the whole story, and tendered her resignation.

No one ever apologized to Amos, but Mr. Hill wrote a very humble letter to Phanor, and begged his pardon for the lamentable and unintentional insult.

This episode did not have its full effect till six months had passed.

CHAPTER XII

TOWARDS the end of the school year, there was uneasiness in the air; the Senior class was preparing to graduate, and there was a great deal of talk of colleges and careers and getting started in life. Amos was out of it. He had always regarded his own position as fixed and settled, but now he found that he was more unsettled than any one else.

He wasn't ready to start; he hadn't made up his mind. He told himself that he had merely a clear choice to make: should he go into the Mill directly school was over, or should he go to college first? But he knew that his real choice was between going into the Mill willingly, and going in unwillingly. And college would give him time to think.

"Dad, I'd like your advice," he said to Phanor.

"What's the matter now? "

"Nothing. But about the future. I've only got one more year in school, and I've got to begin to think about college."

"Well, what do you think about it? "

"That's what I want to talk about. I can't go, of course, unless you'll send me. Now, do you think I ought to go, and do you want to send me? "

"Of course, I want to give you every advantage,"

Phanor said. "I've always said that. I'm thankful I can pay the bill. It's just a question of whether college is worth the extra time or not, just a question of whether college is the wisest thing or not, that's all."

"Yes; that's the question."

"I don't think there's any doubt but what the college man has an advantage. I can see that, down at the Mill, every day. The men that have been to college are free in their tastes. Of course, it takes another three or four years; a man's that much longer in getting started. It's a question whether or not it's worth the extra time."

"Yes, sir."

"Things down at the Mill have been unsettled—have been for a number of years. I've seen men, recently, advanced right over the heads of men that have been there longer than they have."

"Well, were they college men? "

"Some of them were, and some of them weren't. Men get ahead, and make successes of themselves, on their ability. Nobody's going to put a man ahead just because he's been to college, you know."

"No, of course not. But do you think a college man has a better chance? "

"Well, it's hard to say, offhand."

Evidently it was impossible to say.

Phanor would have liked to say that college was an absolute essential for success, but, if he said that, it would imply that he himself owed his success to his college training, and it "wouldn't be wise" to give

the boy that idea. He had succeeded, in spite of the handicap of careless training and rather stupid parents, because—well, hang it all, because he was Phanor Enday! The boy had great confidence in him, and admired him; there was no sense in smashing the boy's ideals, was there?

Amos was wondering how he could manage to conceal his true reason for wanting to go to college—namely, that it would offer him, perhaps, some chance of escape from the Mill. Terrible as it seemed to say it, he didn't want to go into the Mill at all.

"Well," he said. "There's this side to the question, too. I should think that a college man would be in a better position to choose what he wanted to do."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, there are other things besides the Mill, I should think."

"Certainly there are," said Phanor, disappointed. What was the matter with the boy, anyway? Weren't things hard enough, without trying to branch out into something untried?

"Well, I was just thinking that perhaps I might find something I liked better."

"I'm not urging you to go into the Mill, my boy. There's plenty of other things. But you want to remember that you've got a start in the Mill, because of my position, that you wouldn't get elsewhere, maybe. That's all. There's no sense in throwing away an opportunity."

"Well, no. Only, some things aren't worth while."

"Good Lord, boy! I guess a place in the world is worth while! If you want to be a success, and have some of the comforts of life, and, later on, a few of the luxuries, perhaps, you've got to get out and hustle for it. Money don't grow on bushes, you know."

Amos was thinking of the story of how his father got his start. Mr. Fleetwood had come along with an opportunity, and Phanor had been keen enough to see it. No, one couldn't afford to take any chances. Phanor had never had an opportunity, after that first one.

And yet—the thought was terribly insistent—what did it avail a man if he gained the whole world and lost his own soul? Was there something in that, or was it just nonsense out of Sunday School?

"Of course, if you've got some chance I don't know about . . ." Phanor was saying, facetiously. This was the concluding remark of a long speech, to which Amos hadn't listened.

"No, I haven't."

"Well, you've got to do something, haven't you? You can't be dependent on me all your life, can you? Unless, of course, you're content to be a failure."

"You bet not! "

"Well, then."

"I'd like a chance to look around a little and make up my mind, that's all."

"You've had chances enough, I should think, in all these years."

"I know. I've thought about it a lot. Only, I can't decide about college. What would be your advice? "

"Well, of course, a college education is an advantage to a man; I guess you see that for yourself. Whether it's worth the extra time or not, is another question."

And so on, for the better part of an hour.

When vacation time arrived, the house was closed, the gas and water shut off, the silver hidden in the wall-paper barrel, the police notified, the whole machine wound up, wrapped and sealed for the precarious period of absence, and the Endays set out for Lakeside Lodge, hot and worried, wishing it were over.

At Mahocket Junction they scrambled off, and their trunk was bounced down beside them. The train pulled out, leaving silence behind it; as the noise of the locomotive grew faint in the distance the croaking of the frogs in the pond across the road became audible, and the stamping of the horse, tormented by the buzzing flies.

Constance had ridden over from the Lodge to meet them.

"Jinks! I'm glad to see you!" she cried.

She shook Amos heartily by the hand, made a polite salutation to Phanor, and then went up to Isabel and kissed her! This was serious.

"I thought Amos and I could just walk over," Constance said.

"Oh, that would be lovely," said Isabel.

"Cricky, that long walk! Look out you don't get lost."

"How absurd, Phanor."

Amos and Constance set out together; in a few minutes the buckboard passed them—Isabel gave them an encouraging smile through the thick cloud of dust that rose behind—and they were left alone on the quiet sunny road. The birds sang in the woods, and the shadows of the clouds were passing over the faces of the hills.

"It certainly is great to be here again," Amos said.

"I wish I could live in this sort of place always."

"Oh, it's just too heavenly!" Constance admitted.

"But, just the same, I'll bet you'd get sick of it."

"Oh, you live in the country all the time, of course. I suppose people always want to live somewhere they can't. I do. Anywhere at all, so long as it's somewhere else."

Constance smiled, and then looked puzzled.

"How funny!" she exclaimed.

"Funny! That's a queer idea of what's funny! Do you see what it means? With me, it means that I'm all unsettled and mixed up and undecided. I feel as if I were in a cage, all the time. I want something, and I don't know what it is, and I don't know where to look for it."

"Some place to live, do you mean?"

"Oh, I guess so!" Amos sighed, wearily. "What was the use of telling Constance these things? She couldn't

help. She couldn't see what it was all about. He might talk to her all day, and she never get the idea that there might be something radically wrong with life—why, she couldn't even see that there was such a thing as life, something separate from her own existence. She'd say, "How funny!" just like anybody else. That was the trouble with Constance; she was just like everybody else.

"Well, I like it here. This is a good enough place for now," he said. "If I could only be sure of it—or of anything! But I don't suppose I'll ever see it again, after this summer."

"Why not?"

"I've only got one more year in school. And then I'm going into the Mill, or else to college."

"Oh, college!" Constance sounded resentful and disappointed.

"Well," Amos said, desperately, "it'll keep me out of the Mill that much longer, anyway."

"But don't you want to go into the Mill?"

"I hate it. I hate the very idea of it!"

"Why, I think it's just the dandiest chance! With your father there, and everything!"

"Yes. I've worked in the Mill before. Just one day after another, stuck in with a lot of poisonous old pigs that don't know any more than just to keep on grubbing along. And making thread—Gee, you don't even make thread! If you did, it would be something! But you sit at the desk all day and shove little bits of paper

around and talk about what you're doing, and you don't do a thing! "

Constance laughed, and then became serious.

" I think you're horrid and cynical to talk like that," she said.

" I'm sick of it, I'll tell you that much. If only the Mill wouldn't get me, I wouldn't—— Oh, I wouldn't care what happened."

" Suppose everybody felt like that? "

" Well, they don't. Lord, the way people live! Cooped up and stuck to a desk, fussing around! And marrying somebody that just wants you to keep your job and make a lot of money! "

" That's mean of you, to say that. That's the way most people do."

" That's the trouble with it."

" Well, wouldn't you want to ever get married? "

" Well, I'd rather be not married and wish I was, than married and sorry for it."

" I guess you'd get over that, fast enough, if the right girl came along."

" Oh, the right girl, yes! Then I wouldn't be sorry for it, don't you see? Always talking about 'getting somewhere,' and that means getting deeper and deeper into the Mill."

" But . . . People are like that! "

" It's too bad, isn't it? "

" You great big goose! What do you want to go

and pretend you're different from everybody else for? "

" Well, supposing you are different from everybody else? What then? "

" But you're not! " Constance cried. She was stoutly defending him against his own accusations.

" You don't know me," Amos said.

For some time they walked in silence.

" Look, there's our hill! " Constance said. " Remember? I've been up there, often, to the place we picked out."

" Have you been down on the other side yet? " he asked.

" No."

Amos thought, " Of course not; you wouldn't do anything."

" I was waiting till you came," Constance went on.

" All right; let's go this afternoon. Want to? "

" Oh, I don't know if I can. I sort of half promised I'd go for a walk with Doctor Penny."

" Who's he? " asked Amos, quickly.

" Why, you know! He was here last year. He's the Doctor at Sheridan Academy now."

" Oh, is he? "

" He's just the dearest thing! We go for walks a lot! "

Amos looked across at her. There were no pointed lightnings above her head—not even a muttering of thunder!

" And you knew I was coming! " he said.

"Well . . . Oh, what day is to-day? Is this Saturday? Isn't that the funniest thing? I was thinking it was Friday! Jinks! It was yesterday I was going with Doctor Penny. He must have waited for hours. What'll he think! "

"Something foolish, probably," Amos said.

Constance looked at him.

As they approached the Lodge, they saw Phanor and Isabel on the porch, where the Misses Cadwallader were welcoming them, with Mr. and Mrs. Winterbourne close at hand. Mrs. Winterbourne waved to them as they came in sight at the turn of the road.

"Well, my boy; glad to see you!" Mr. Winterbourne said to Amos.

Then Mrs. Winterbourne came forward, beaming—as always—and kissed him! He began to think up some excuse for postponing his walk with Constance, but before he could find any words, Constance came into the conversation.

"Oh, mother," she said. "Amos and I want to go up the hill after lunch, and go down on the other side, in the valley. Can we, Mother? "

"That will be lovely!" Mrs. Winterbourne said.

Amos went to his room—the familiar one which he had occupied the year before—thinking that there was no way to stop the girl, if she had once made up her mind that she wanted something.

But she had kissed Isabel, and her mother had kissed him! There was something sinister behind that.

There were, obviously, nearly as many different views of life as there were people in the world—well, of course, with the exception that most of the people in Wilton stuck together. Who, Amos wondered, was to say what was what? Some one must be right.

And then came Frank, the stable-man, with his interpretation of the round world.

Amos had wandered out to the barn, one evening after supper as the shadows were growing long across the lake, and came upon Frank, standing in an easy and picturesque attitude beside a small fire. He was without his coat, and his vest was unbuttoned, and he wore a knotted handkerchief about his neck; there was something very appealing in the picture, and Amos came up and stood gazing into the fire.

"A fire's great company, when a man's lonesome," Frank said.

"I was thinking that you looked like a cow-boy," Amos said.

"Yes. They generally builds a small fire like that; just a bunch of twigs, where an ordinary man would be using damn great logs. And the smoke goes straight up into the sky."

"That sounds like Arizona," Amos ventured.

"Arizona, and everywhere out there."

"Were you ever a cow-boy? "

"Me? Hell, no! It takes too much energy. But I've seen plenty of 'em, out West."

"What were you doing? "

"Oh, riding the bumpers, mostly. I been all over.

Out to 'Frisco. Oh, yes. You'll see an old woman, dodging around the back streets with a stick and a spike in the end of it, and a long cloak. And every once in a while she'll make a jab with the stick and pick a cigar stump, or something, and slip it into the bag she's hiding under her cloak, looking around, all the time, because it's against the law to make cigarettes out of all them butts and things. Yes, Board of Health. And sometimes you'll be sneaking up some back alley, and you'll see a light in a window, and you'll look in, and there'll be one of these old b'God hags, grinding and grinding on a machine and feeding the butts in with the other hand, and smoking one herself, as like as not, and maybe she ain't particular about where the spit goes. They sell 'em for a penny a pack."

"They must be awful cigarettes."

"Oh, they ain't so bad as you'd think. If you don't know where they come from. I've smoked 'em, myself. And I've got many a ride off 'em, giving 'em to a brakeman. Those are the sons of wolves, those brakemen! Damned if they won't do anything; stomp on a man's fingers, throw him right off the top of a car; anything."

"Why, there was a road out there one time, offered a thousand dollars if a hobo could steal a ride on their line; their brakemen was such devils. A thousand dollars, they said, if a man could sneak a hundred miles off 'em."

"And did anybody do it? "

"Sure, yes! I knew the feller. There was another that tried it, and they pretty near killed him; threw coal on him, and he had to jump off the top of the car, going thirty miles an hour, b'God! But this feller did it."

"How? "

"Riding in the water tank, in the tender, the whole way. The devil! With the water up to his chin! "

"And did they pay him? "

"Sure they did! How could they help themselves? They came to the end of the run, and he lifts up the lid and shoves his head up out of the tank, and says, where's my thousand dollars, and they had to give it to him. Called him right into the president's office, and he give it to him. Him and me bummed it together for a while after that, and you bet your foot we traveled in style while it lasted. No ordinary coaches for us; we used the Pullmans."

"And what did you do then? "

"Well, when the money was gone, we made tintypes at a fair for a while. And then we got sick of the damn tintypes, and was riding the trucks one time, when the weather got cold, going South, and he fell, somehow, and the brake-beam hit him, and killed him. Right down between the rails. I didn't ride the trucks no more, after that."

"How did you do it, then? "

"Oh, you know them bumper-beams that go across the ends of the cars? Well, I'd put my sit-down on one of 'em, and my feet on the other, and ride along

as comfortable as you please. If you ever slip, it's good-by. I've had many a ride that way. You'll be riding along, sitting there, looking out between the cars at the sides, and you see a fire, way off b'God on the prairie, and then all of a sudden you'll get a crack on the knob, and you'll look up, and there'll be a son of a wolf of a brakeman, throwing coal down on you. You'll grab every rag you have on you—because, by Judas, it'll blow off if you didn't—and you just jump straight out in the dark, and maybe you land in the river, or go head over ginbottle down the bank. And you get up and poke along over to the fire, and there'll be some hoboes—maybe twenty, maybe thirty hoboes; a hell of a crowd—all sitting round the fire, and you'll tell 'em you're hungry, and they'll say 'Sure!' and chuck you a whole chicken, like as not, and you're so damn hungry you could bite the Northeast corner off a sewer, and you'll tear right into the damned thing, whether it's cooked or not. They'll give a man anything, those devils."

"And what do they do?"

"Why, they sit around the damn fire, these sons of wolves, and they roll dice, and the feller that rolls the lowest, he has to go into town the next day and beg for the crowd, and they can order anything they like. If it's a feller they hate, they'll order the damndest things—I heard a feller order Charlotte Russe one time. And the feller can't come back till he's got everything."

"Did you ever have to go out like that?"

"Once I did. And I got everything, only there was one devil that had ordered pie, and I couldn't raise none, high or low, and I cut a woman's grass for her, and she give me a dime, and I bought a pie. They'll give you anything, those people."

"Why, one time I was riding a freight with a feller, and we stopped for water, and me and him went up to a house that was near the track, and the woman give us a regular sit-down meal in the kitchen. And the other lad, he was letting on to be deaf and dumb, and I did the talking. Well, while we were eating, the engineer give a whistle, and this damn fool, that was supposed to be deaf and dumb, he hollers out 'By God, there goes our train!' We scooped up the grub and lit out."

"What did she do?"

"She watched us go. What the hell else could she do?"

"One time I was riding a freight in from Canada, and I got a job keeping the fires going in a bunch of cars that was loaded with potatoes, and as soon as we got started, I begin to sell the potatoes. Everywhere we stopped, the farmers would come down, and I'd sell 'em for a nickel a bushel, and when I got to the end of the trip they give me ten dollars and I'd sold forty dollars' worth of potatoes."

"Well, I don't see what you stay around here for," Amos said.

"Oh, I ain't going to be here long. What's the use? When the cold weather comes, I'll light out for the

sunny south, I guess. I'll go to Louisville, Kentucky, and get into a fight with some lads in front of the jail. They've got the best jail in Louisville I was ever in."

Amos came away from that interview, and from several subsequent ones, feeling that he had discovered a last resort. If worse should come to worst, now that he knew how hoboed lived . . . if he had known this when he had tried to run away, how differently life might have turned out! Frank was a failure, true enough, but it didn't seem to have hurt him; failure never hurt a man who didn't care whether he failed or not.


"Don't you ever get riding the bumpers, son," Frank seriously told him, when he opened the subject again.

"Why not?" Amos asked. "It sounds like a great life, I should think."

"I'll tell you why not," Frank answered. "You get started, and you can't stop. Look at me; I ain't never been more than two months in one place, ever since I was a kid. I been here near a month, now, and it's about time I was getting somewhere else."

He stood there over his fire, his hand on his hip, gazing into the embers.

For several days Amos had noticed that his father and mother were spending a great deal of time with Doctor Penny, but the circumstance aroused no specific suspicions, for he had never done more than exchange the ordinary daily civilities with the doctor,



and could not believe that the conversation was related in any manner to himself. But the interviews continued, and often, as he looked back to the porch as he was starting out for a walk with Constance, he saw Phanor and Isabel in earnest talk with the Doctor, leaning forward towards one another, with their chairs drawn close together. Then he became curious.

He found an opportunity to linger near them, trying to overhear, but though they kept on talking, it was with the air of people who have just changed their subject, and he learned nothing.

"What are you and Dad talking with Doctor Penny about?" he asked Isabel.

"Nothing whatever," Isabel answered. "If it's of any interest to you, you'll find out all about it in good time."

Obviously, something terrible was about to happen.

A few days after this, finding Phanor and Isabel alone on the porch, he strolled up and took a seat on the edge of the floor at his mother's feet, thinking that he might as well know the worst at once.

"What would you say to going away to school?" Phanor asked.

"What school?"

"Oh, some good school."

"Why, I don't understand. What's the idea?"

"I asked a simple question, I should think," Phanor said. "Your mother and I have been talking it over, and we thought it might be a good idea for you to go away to school for this last year, perhaps."

Amos saw a faint chance for escape; at any rate, it couldn't land him in a worse place than he was now in. Phanor was obviously waiting for him to say he was delighted.

"I'd like that, very much," he said.

"What would you say to Sheridan Academy?"

That was different!

"I'd like it better than anything else in the world!" he cried. Why, Sheridan Academy was a real chance for escape—its reputation, the boys who attended it, the fact that it was not in Wilton . . . why, perhaps he was to be saved, after all!

"I was sure, from what Doctor Penny said, that you would like the idea," Isabel said.

Amos really knew nothing of Sheridan Academy except that Dick Fleetwood expected to go there, some day, and was very cocky about it. Isabel knew this, too, and had been on Doctor Penny's side of the argument from the first.

"Your mother and I think you're not getting much out of Wilton High School," Phanor said. "Such a lot of sap-heads."

"That's what I've always thought, myself," Amos said. "What's Sheridan like?"

He wanted to appear more enthusiastic, as he felt; but it wouldn't do to show any emotion before his parents.

"It's a very fine school," Isabel said. "Nice boys go there, and it would be better for you, probably, than staying around at home."

Amos was amazed at this. Was his mother actually admitting that there might be something for Amos Enday beyond the sphere of influence of the parlor at 97 Elm Street? So it would seem. She had spoken as if she were fully conscious of making a great sacrifice and of waiving her rights to keep him under her wing.

"You may learn something," said Phanor, not to be outdone. "That is, if you tend to business, and don't waste your time. You might meet people that would be an advantage to you."

Phanor wanted it distinctly understood that he was spending a great deal of money. He wasn't called upon to send the boy to Sheridan, was he? Well, then.

"Why, I think this is great!" Amos cried. "Do you really mean it?"

"I said so, didn't I?" said Phanor.

"Well, yes; but I can hardly believe it. Do you mean I can go right on and do the same work I'm doing at Wilton?"

"Doctor Penny gives me to understand that your work would be accepted for the Senior class at Sheridan."

"Gee, that's bully! When does it begin?"

"Now, you're not to regard it as settled, you know. It was just a suggestion."

"But I'll have to know pretty soon," Amos urged. "I'll have to get ready, and everything."

"There's plenty of time yet," Phanor said. "And I want you to understand this; if you go, it means work. I don't want any shirking of lessons, or fooling.

The money's not to be thrown away; you're to understand that, right from the start."

Amos saw from this, that the matter had already been decided, and he promised, naturally, to work hard and justify the money spent on him.

He wandered off in the woods to think on his good fortune.

They were letting him get away! Did that mean that he was to decide things for himself? Or did it mean that there was really no chance of it? They wouldn't have taken this chance so gaily, he reasoned, if there was a possibility that he might avail himself of it.

He approached Doctor Penny with questions, and was handed a pamphlet of the school. In reading it, and in looking at the pictures, which showed Sheridan to be in quite the most beautiful place in the world, and a true Paradise for the boys whom it accepted, he forgot all about its possible opportunities, and thought of it only as a new and fascinating experience.

When he looked at the magnificent corridors of the school, it did not seem possible that he should ever walk along them. When he saw a group of Sheridan boys, gathered about an athletic trophy that they had won, it seemed incredible that he would one day actually speak with just such boys. Was he the same person who used to go to school cross-lots? Was he to be blessed with the dignity and urbanity of a "faculty"—the same boy who had had to endure the stupidity of Miss MacReady? Why, it was only a few years since

he had wondered desperately how he was to reach the world at all!

He told Constance the news, and she was jubilant. Sheridan was the very best thing she could imagine; anything better would have been out of her world altogether.

"Jinks!" she cried. "I'll just die of stuck-upness, knowing a boy that goes to Sheridan!"

"Why shouldn't I go to Sheridan?" Amos retorted, somewhat sharply. In his heart, though, he felt that there was something miraculous about it. But that was no reason for Constance to be proud!

On the last day, as they were preparing to leave, Constance said:

"I hope you won't be too proud to write, once in a while."

"Why, no," he answered, scowling at her as if to pretend that he didn't know what she meant. "Why should I be proud? Don't be silly!"

In consequence of this little encounter, she bade him good-by more coldly than he had expected, and sent him away disappointed and bewildered. It was quite the cleverest thing she could have done, for he thought about her in the train all the way back to Wilton.

Constance wasn't so bad. True, she was irritating at times, and there were things about her that required forbearance. He had a feeling that she was envious of him because he was going to Sheridan, and jealous of the school for taking him away into another world. What did she think? Silly little ninny! Yet she had,

by her very resentment—if that is what it was—raised him in his own esteem, and caused him to view his prospects with still greater enthusiasm. And he fell to wondering if she had done this intentionally.

CHAPTER XIII

THE Reverend Lynall Kimber, while he was at college, had been a councilor in a boy's summer camp. After his graduation, he had continued this connection, because he liked the work and saw in it continued opportunity for service; in time he had started a camp of his own. People said that it was because he took an interest in service of humanity; the fact of the matter was, the camp paid much better than the ministry; for one or another of these reasons, at any rate, he had given up his pastoral duties altogether, and devoted his genius to boys' camps.

During the winters, he wrote books, and his "Moulding Young Manhood," and "As the Twig is Bent" had raised him to first rank among the more progressive educators of his time. It is doubtful if his books were much read beyond the limits of his own friendship, but his friends were the very ones to best appreciate him, and he attained a considerable reputation. Yet he was not content.

His camp work was a monotonous repetition, year after year, changing only in that the amount of his income increased as he became more efficient in management; as for his books, he had put forth everything he had to say, and felt that he would never again be able to attain the high level of the works on which his

reputation rested. Accordingly, he had looked about for something else, and, by taking in a few boys to tutor, and gradually increasing their number, he had built up something that might be considered a school.

He was still a young man, and ambitious; he was as sincere and earnest as a cannon-ball; his friends rallied around him to help in his venture, and by the time he was fifty he had established the Sheridan Academy. He chose Lakewood as its site, and the corporation which he formed was able to erect a group of splendid modern buildings on a hill overlooking the village, with beautiful views across the valleys in all directions. He never walked about the hill-top, or paced the shining corridors of his school, without feeling a thrill of delight and pride in his achievement; he could not see that any man, anywhere, at any time, would have been able, granting the circumstances, to do more than he had done.

The majority of his stockholders, who were also his friends, lived in Lakewood, and this fact enabled him to put special emphasis on the social advantages that his school could offer. Besides this, he made a feature of "producing young gentlemen" out of "manly material," and of his "honor system," which was carried out by means of an elaborate schedule of fines.

When some of the young gentlemen were sent to his office to be disciplined, he used to marvel at his ability to swagger and lord it over them, although he was accustomed to being in charge of boys; and whenever he spun about in his chair, and looked out down the valley

—on a clear day he could see the sun shining on the roofs of Wilton, twenty miles away—he used to be astonished at the miracle that had thus placed him at the top of the world.

Great geniuses, he reflected, are almost always unconscious of their greatness. But this was chiefly on account of their characteristic modesty, and modesty was another of the qualities in which he was preëminent.

There were several interesting and influential people in Lakewood, and they formed a social group, with Dr. Kimber at its head, and kept on excellent terms with him because of his school. As for the village itself, it lived by the presence of the school boys, and considered Sheridan Academy the most important of the world's institutions.

On the 21st of September, 1894, Amos, carrying a new and shining suitcase, climbed down from the train at the Lakewood station, in company with some other boys, to whom he had not dared to speak, and looked about him with the air of a man just landed on a desert island.

As he started up through the village, and saw the red brick buildings of the school, his heart went down into his shoes. He was to be a regular Sheridan Boy. And he did not know how to do it. He had no training nor traditions behind him to show him, and there was nothing specific before him except a vague hope that he would, somehow, be able to fit into the organization,

and be inconspicuous and orthodox. But it was no small thing to be an orthodox school boy, when he didn't know how.

However, he put on a brave front, and walked on ahead of the others who had come in the train with him, arriving alone at the school gates, and starting alone up the gravel walk that led to the main entrance. As he approached, he saw a group of boys lounging on the steps, and he could see them looking at him, and turning to speak to one another, as if they were discussing him, and he wished he had never come.

"Where can I find Doctor Kimber, please?" he asked, addressing the group in general.

The boys all looked up at one of their number, as if they recognized him as their natural spokesman.

"Are you a new boy?" this one asked.

"Yes," Amos said. "That is, I'm going to start in in the Senior Class."

"Oh, I see," said the boy, drily. "I thought maybe you were one of the new professors. So you want to see old B. F., do you?"

"I thought it was Doctor Kimber," Amos said.

"Yes; his real name's old B. F. He's in there." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Door straight ahead. Maybe he'll tell you something you ought to know."

Amos went in. To right and left of him stretched a long corridor, with patches of sunlight lying on its polished floor. It was very different from the dark and musty hallways of the Wilton High School.

He went across to the door which faced him, and knocked, feebly, wondering if this were the proper thing to do. A muffled voice answered from within; he opened the door, and entered.

A dried and twisted man, thin, and abrupt in his movements, with a sharp and shallow chin that almost met his nose, hooked like an eagle's beak, and fierce keen eyes—Doctor Lynall Kimber, Head-master of Sheridan Academy.

"Doctor Kimber?" Amos murmured. This was a foolish start, he thought; who else could it have been?

"The same."

"I'm a new boy. My name is Enday; Amos Enday. From Wilton."

The Doctor leaped from his chair, darted forward, and clutched Amos by the hand.

"I'm pleased, indeed, to see you, sir. I have been advised of your arrival. Registration in the Common Study at half-past twelve. Find Robertson, the Head Boy of West House; he'll show you your room."

Doctor Kimber flung himself back into his chair and relapsed into a spasm of abstraction.

Amos turned to the door, and said, "Thank you, sir."

Doctor Kimber made a gesture with his hand, and permitted himself a rapid smile.

"Welcome to Sheridan," he said, and stared piercingly at his paperweight.

After this rather startling reception by Doctor Kimber, Amos felt able to meet the group on the steps

again with more assurance than he had shown before, and he went out again and asked for a boy named Robertson.

"I'm Robertson," said the boy who had spoken before. "What might you want?"

"Doctor Kimber told me to ask for you," Amos said. "He said you'd tell me what to do. My name's Enday."

Robertson introduced him to the other boys, one of whom, Duncan by name, looked him over appraisingly.

"He'll make a miler, won't he, Robby?" Duncan asked.

"Maybe," Robertson said. "Can you run?"

"I never did," said Amos.

"Oh. Where did you go to school?"

"Wilton High."

"Oh. Well, we'll see what we can make of you. Now, for a starter; never call old B. F. anything but old B. F. Understand?"

"Is that Doctor Kimber?" Amos asked.

"No," said Robertson, "it's old B. F. That stands for Beetle Face. You've seen him, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you didn't need to ask, I should think. Come along, and I'll show you your den."

Amos followed to West House, which was connected with the main school by a covered passageway; Robertson referred to a card which he took from his pocket, and showed him up to a small room on the second floor, which was to be his own. It contained a

bed, a desk, two chairs, and a bureau. The view from the window, as from every other window in the school, was extensive and beautiful.


"This is your den," Robertson said. "You're to be in it every night after eight o'clock, and no lights after half-past ten. Your trunk goes in the closet, not out here in the room. Don't put any pictures up on the walls. Never tell anybody your first name; I happen to know it's Amos, but nobody else is supposed to know. Seniors don't have any bounds, and you can go anywhere you like, except to the Lakewood House before four o'clock in the afternoon. Always wear a derby on Sundays, but never during the week, unless you're going somewhere special. Don't ever lock your door; never cheat; never squeal. If you want to know anything, ask me. Registration's at half-past twelve, in the Study, at the other end of the Main School. That's all you need to know."

Robertson went out and closed the door.

Amos listened to the footsteps growing more distant down the hall and descending the stairs.

He sat down on the edge of his bed and surveyed the room. It was the first time in his life that he had ever really been alone.

After registration, which seemed to Amos a very dignified and urbane proceeding, the heads of the two houses called a general meeting of the students. The entering class was instructed in the meaning of life, and



told how to cultivate and preserve that essential of essentials, School Spirit; the older boys then made speeches, interrupted by a great deal of cheering and applause, outlining the school's achievements for the coming year; at the end, the meeting was thrown open, and the seniors moved about among the members of the lower classes, urging participation in extra-curriculum activities.

"You're going out for the mile, aren't you?" asked one of the boys who had been on the steps with Robertson when Amos arrived. "You ought to."

"Well, I will if I dare," Amos said.

"Sure, you dare. That's the proper spirit."

"Well, I never ran before, you know. I don't believe I'll be much good at it."

"Shucks, that's no way to make a runner! Hey, Wilson; come on over here a minute. Here's a man that wants to go out for the mile."

Wilson, Captain of the Track Team, strolled over, and Amos was introduced to him.

"What's your time for the mile?" he asked.

"I don't know. I never ran," Amos said.

"Well, if you want to be a miler, you've got to beat Harvey, you know. Think he can beat Harvey, Dunk?"

The two boys exchanged amused glances.

"I'll try," Amos said, stoutly enough, though he expected to be struck dead for his presumption.

Wilson laughed outright.


"I must tell old Harvey that," he said. "You come on down to the Track House to-morrow afternoon at four, and we'll see what you're good for."

All this seemed terrible, yet it delighted him. The Captain of the Track Team, the school in general, the whole world, looked towards him now with the expectation that he would make something of himself. This was just what he had always wanted, but he had not realized that the task would carry with it so great a load of responsibility. Why, he had to announce, in advance, what he was going to try to do! If he should fail, the whole school would know of it! This matter of being a personality seemed, after all, to have a public aspect.

He did not see that no more was being asked of him than that he should conform to the organization of which he was a part; but if he had seen it, it is probable that he would have recognized the fact that conformity with Sheridan was a vastly more satisfying thing, and more in his line, than conformity with the mandates of his father and mother, and the spirit of the parlor at home.

At the end of his second day in school, he wrote to his father as follows:

They wanted me to go out for Track, and see what I could do in the mile, and so I've been down to the Track House this afternoon. They only let me do a half, and I got pretty well winded, but I'm going to try again, and start training. Wilson wouldn't tell me the time I made, but I guess it was pretty good, because they wanted me to



come out to-morrow. There's a boy named Harvey that's the school's best miler, and runs in the big Meet, and unless I can get fast enough to beat him I won't get in. It means lots of hard work.

He stopped at that, and chewed his penholder for a time, reflecting on the probable effect of what he had written. At first he thought it would perhaps be unwise to send such a letter at all, but then he saw that unless he made a firm stand now, at the very beginning, there would be trouble about athletics all the rest of his life. So he decided to stick to what he had written, but added another paragraph, as a sop to Respectability:

I shall try very hard to get good marks in my school work, because I know you are paying a lot for me to be here, and I want you to know that I appreciate it.

A few days later, Phanor replied:

MY DEAR AMOS:

I have yours of the 22nd. I must warn you in advance that all thought of athletics must stop if it seems to come into conflict with your school work. I am the last one to disapprove of athletics, but there are more important things in life, and you must not neglect your studies. I would suggest that it might be wiser to postpone the running until some later date, when you have had time to accustom yourself to the ways of the school, and have established yourself as a student. I cannot afford to have you fritter away your time on non-essentials. Your mother joins me in this.

You neglected to mention what arrangements you had made in regard to your laundry.

Your affectionate

FATHER.

It was very evident that Phanor wanted the boy to turn over a new leaf, but he seemed to fear—and, as he thought about it, Amos feared it, too—that there was danger of his turning the wrong leaf, or of turning too many, and skipping something.

Amos thought it probable that there were no other parents in all the world so stubbornly dedicated to safety in life as his own were, nor any who moved in a path quite so unregardful of all that lay on either hand. This made his case special, and different. Also, it was probable that the other school boys were not worrying about things all the time, as he was doing, but he had been doing it since he was a baby, and he couldn't stop.

He set out for the Track House, every afternoon, in high enthusiasm. This was something that interested him; his parents were not urging it, and it had no special conformity with the rules of conduct. He had done things like this before, he told himself. But they seemed to have been done a long time ago, in a mood of recklessness and rebellion that was unknown to him now.

He ran well. There were three other possibilities for the mile; the first he defeated with comparative

ease; the second he crowded rather hard; Harvey, the leader, was as yet far out of reach, though not so far that there was no hope of ever overtaking him.

Perhaps, if he gave up everything in the effort to snatch the school record for the mile, he might succeed, and thus gain an achievement of his own. But how absurd! Could he go back to the world and say, when he was asked what he was good for, that he was the best miler in Sheridan Academy?

He returned in a mood of profound depression. He felt like apologizing for the time he had spent. This surprised him, and made him uneasy. Why, he had always been one to sneak out of his work on every possible occasion and count it pure gain! Responsibility weighed heavily on him. He was no longer what he had been. It must be that age was beginning to have its effect on him.

But he worried about it and debated over it with himself, trying to see some way out of it, when there was really nothing to get out of. He was in a new manner of life, but he sighed to think that he was the same old person.

When he went home for the Christmas vacation, Phanor and Isabel were delighted with the very creditable list of marks he was able to present. Amos looked so well, and was so enthusiastic, and told such merry tales of his adventures and his good times, that they began to think they had done wisely in sending him

away to school. They spent many evenings in conversation, praising each other—after their own fashion—for having been so discerning.

He said little about the Track Team. He seemed now in a fair way to beat out the second on the list of the school's milers, and even, in more sanguine moments, to give Harvey a struggle for his place, but he saw that this was something that would not interest his parents. If he told them, they would think that his good marks had been merely a fluke, and they would pick on him and discourage him by telling him that he was on a course which led straight to disaster. Yet, by not mentioning it, he was giving them the impression that he had turned over the new leaf, and was becoming the sort of man they wanted him to be. And he was not willing that they should think this.

So he let them think what they pleased, and said nothing of his new scale of values. He had responsibility enough to himself, now, without reviving the old responsibility to his parents.

The parlor, with its spasms of sour color, its seedy and incongruous furniture, its frenzied atmosphere of deaf and dumb and blind perversity, reached him as a vague feeling of hopelessness. It sat prim and secure in its fussy draperies, defying thought and inspiration and joy, praying God that nothing would ever happen.

But it meant something different to Amos Enday, whose first ideas of life were connected with it. He had played in that parlor; he had discovered his earliest reactions from its rubber-plant, its sprawling piano; he

had wept for the lonely and lovely girl in the engraving between its windows; he had started out with it as an inspiration and as a guide.

The rest of the town was just as discouraging. Wilson's barn, the cross-lots path to school, the Mill and the shipping room, the horse-car yard, the street on which Burton had lived, Belle's house—Oh, if Belle had only lived, how different life might have been! If only . . . if only the past were here now, or the future had come, or he were somewhere else!

He counted the days till school should come again. In desperation, he went out to Shrewsbury, and called on Constance.

She was glad to hear about the Track Team.

"Oh, I'd just die of joy if you should make it!" she cried. "Don't you get a letter for it, or something?"

"A ribbon for your hat," Amos told her.

"Jinks! I think it's just the corkingest honor!"

"Well, it is something," he admitted. "You see, I never did any running before, hardly. But, Gee, it's nothing like what a runner in college is!"

"Oh," said Constance, soberly. "Are you really going to college?"

"I guess so. I haven't decided yet. Well, really, it's my father that hasn't decided yet."

"I don't see what you have to go to college for."

"It'll give me more time to think things over."

"Seems to me you want a lot of time to think things

over. I should think you'd rather start in and do something, as soon as you can."

"What does a girl know about that sort of thing, Constance?"

"Well, I thought you were going into the Mill."

"Gee, why should I?"

"I think it would be just awfully foolish to miss that dandy chance. I know just crowds of boys in college, and they just waste a lot of time, and come back and start in just where they'd be if they hadn't been at all."

"Well, their mistake is in coming back and starting in. I don't want to do that. I can't tell you how much I don't want to!"

"What do you want to do, then?"

"Well . . . something else."

"But what?"

"I don't know," Amos said. "Be a poet, maybe," he added. He spoke humorously, smiling, but it was a pathetic utterance, none the less.

"You're such a dear!" Constance exclaimed.

"I don't mean be a poet, of course. I meant something serious. I mean, I'd want to take it up seriously."

"Would you go and live in Italy, like Browning did?" asked Constance, wickedly.

"Maybe I would. Oh, Gee . . . I don't know what it is! But there's something, somewhere, for me to do! There's something I want and love and need—that's what I'm looking for."

"I guess you'll find it, if you keep on looking," Constance said.

"Oh, don't you see? If I'm just like other people, then I wouldn't keep wanting to find something different, all the time. And if I'm not like other people, then there's no sense in my trying to do the same things that other people do. I'm sick of pretending and compromising and trying to do both things at once. I haven't got any time to just mess around with stupidity! "

"I don't think you're different from everybody else," Constance said. "I think you're fine."

"Then what am I thinking these things for? That's what I want to know! People are satisfied, when they're in the right places, where they belong! I'm not satisfied! "

"Oh, Jinks! " Constance retorted. "Everybody thinks they're different! I wanted to be an opera singer, when I was a little girl! "

"Lord! " Amos thought, on his way home. "Perhaps there's something in that! "

During the winter term, things began to improve. Amos worked hard at his studies, and his running was beginning to cause comment in the school, so that he came into public notice, in a small way. This was new to him, and he enjoyed it.

At times, of course, he sat before the fire in the Study, dreaming over his book and wondering what was going to happen; often he stood at his window, looking down at the twinkling lights in the village, pondering on the possible end of all this uncertainty and bewilderment.

and fluttering pennants, while he dug his spikes into the track, he wished there was some special Person there for him, some one for whom he could do his best.

Harvey beat him in the mile, by a considerable margin, but Amos was second, and thus won the first two places for Sheridan; Harvey's victory was looked upon as certain, and Amos was the real hero of the day. He heard a wild burst of applause when he finished, and was thrilled by the sound of his own name at the end of the school cheer.

This was the last day of the winter term; directly after the Meet, Amos went home to Wilton for his vacation.

"Well, boy, I've got some good news for you," Phanor said.

He was sitting there, where he always sat, hunched down in his chair, with his paper in his lap.

"That's fine," Amos said. He was wondering if the news were good in Phanor's estimation only.

"There's an opening in the Mill," said Phanor, and paused for the effect.

Amos' heart sank, but he crossed the room to a chair, and tried to conceal his feelings.

"What sort of an opening?" he asked.

"Well, perhaps I ought not to call it an opening, exactly," Phanor went on. "It's no more than a suggestion, really. But I happened to hear that there might be a vacancy soon, and I made a bid for you."

Nothing may come of it, of course. But I thought I'd speak of it."

Amos looked over at his mother, hoping, perhaps, for some help, but she was watching him, smiling happily, waiting to see his delight and gratitude. He felt trapped; they had taken a mean advantage of him; he had come home, naturally enough, for his vacation, and they pounced on him with this, and expected him to be pleased.

"Is it all settled?" he asked, faintly.

"Well, I can't definitely say that," Phanor said. "I merely suggested that you were coming along soon, now, and that you'd have to find something, so I told them to try and sort of hold things open for you until you could get out of school and take advantage of it."

"What kind of job is it?"

"Why, Hungerford wants a new man. Just recently, they've decided to let him take over the management of the West Mill, in addition to what he's doing already, and he'll need somebody to help him and sort of look after things a little. Of course, it's just a start; no more."

"Oh, yes."

"You don't seem very enthusiastic about it. What's the matter? It's way higher up in the scale than I started in."

"Why, I can't get used to the idea, that's all. I've been thinking . . ."

"I think it's perfectly lovely!" Isabel exclaimed.

"Wasn't that the same place that Mr. Hungerford started in, Phanor? "

Phanor nodded.

"Just think! " said Isabel.

Phanor evidently thought that something was wrong, and began to speak, rapidly, to cover his apprehension.

"Why, Hungerford was in to see me the other day, and he said they were going to give him the West Mill to look after, too, and I said that was fine, and he said he thought he'd have to get another man to help him, and I thought of you, of course. And I said, 'Who have you got in mind?' and he said that the man that was in the West Mill now was a good enough foreman, but that he'd been promoted from the machines and didn't have much education. I know the man; name's Tony, and he don't speak hardly any English. I asked Hungerford if he had anybody in mind, and he said he didn't know of anybody, and then I told him I had you coming along out of school pretty soon, and he said it might not be a bad idea. So the matter rested there. If he don't find anybody before June why he'll be willing to take you in and see what he can make of you."

"Isn't that fine! " Isabel said.

She was still sitting there watching him, her eyes shining, her face lighted up in expectation of his delight. Oh, it was pitiful to hurt her! Amos could have wept.

"Well," he said, slowly, and hesitating between the words, "I'd just like a little time to think it over."

"What do you mean by that?" Phanor asked.

"Why, I mean . . . it's all so . . . I didn't expect it, that's all."

"Well, there's time enough, between now and June. But if you want the place you can't afford to let the grass grow under your feet, that's sure."

Amos gathered all his courage, and said, "I don't think I want it."

There was silence, for a moment. Phanor opened his mouth, and could not shut it again; a weak, "Why, Amos!" burst from Isabel.

"What do you mean?" gasped Phanor.

"I don't want to go in with Mr. Hungerford, that's all."

"You don't want . . . you don't . . . Crickey!"

Phanor sank back in his chair; it was as if the end of the world had been announced.

"See here, young man . . ."

"Well, I don't. What are you making such a fuss about? Aren't there other . . ."

"Stop your noise!" Phanor cried. "What the devil do you mean by telling me a thing like that? Hey? What do you mean by it?"

"I don't want to go into the Mill!" Amos answered. "I'm sorry, but I don't. I don't like it, and I never did, and I won't have anything to do with it. For all of me your old Mill can sink!"

"Why, what a way to talk!" said Isabel.

"Well, that's gratitude, I must say!" exclaimed Phanor.

"I'm much obliged to Mr. Hungerford for thinking of me, and I hope you'll tell him so."

"Hungerford!" Phanor shouted. "What in Hell has Hungerford got to do with it? Answer me that!"

"Why, you said . . ."

"Oh, I said! Great God Almighty! Don't you see where your advantage lies?"

"Does it lie in taking a job I don't want and don't like and never did like and never will like? Why have I got to go into the Mill, if I don't want to?"

"Haven't you got any ambition, for God's sake?"

"Oh, don't talk to me about ambition! You can't see anything in the whole world but your old Mill! What do I care for the Mill, I'd like to know! I don't want it; that's all there is to it. Let's not talk about it any more."

"No!" shouted Phanor. "This thing has got to be thrashed out here and now!"

"Oh, all right then! All right! Ever since I was a baby you've told me the things I cared for were trash and nonsense; whenever I've found something I really liked you've done your best to spoil it for me; I never made a step for myself without getting called a scoundrel and a blackguard and a good-for-nothing. You've always been preaching to me about being a failure—Watch out for this, and watch out for that! Well, I think I'd be a failure if I ever went near the Mill. That's that."

Isabel felt some justice in this; she looked over at

Phanor as if to say, "Now, what have you got to say for yourself?"

But Phanor jumped up, glaring, and advanced on Amos.

"By God!" he shouted. "You'll talk that way to me, will you? After all I've done, you turn around and talk that way to me!"

"Yes, sir," Amos said. "And I don't mean to be disrespectful. You can beat me, if you want to, and I won't hit back. But I don't want to work in the Mill, and I won't do it, if you break every bone in my body."

"Oh, Amos, to think that you'd speak that way to your dear, kind father!" Isabel said.

"I'm going out to Shrewsbury to see Constance," said Amos, suddenly starting for the door.

"And what will Constance say to this, I'd like to know?"

That was true; what would she say? Oh, they had him cornered! There was no one to whom he could go.

Where were his people? The people who were waiting for him, somewhere, wondering why he did not come? He needed them so desperately.

The subject of the place in the Mill was not brought up again while Amos was at home. Phanor moped about the house, saying little, staring at the wall, rattling his paper in his lap as he sat trying to read in the evening. Everything seemed to have gone wrong.

When Amos left to go back to school, Isabel said to him, "I want you to think over what's been said, my son, and see if you think it's kind and considerate to act as you've acted."

This was the final speech, the outcome of long discussions that Phanor and Isabel had carried on whenever Amos' back was turned; just as they thought that he was refusing to go into the Mill because it was they who asked it, so they thought he might be won back from his decision by an appeal to kindness.

He had expected to feel relieved and happy when he once more walked the streets of Lakewood, rejoicing in his freedom, making his own life, at last; instead, he was gloomy and miserable—he had hurt his parents' feelings, and made them unhappy, after all they had done for him; he had been offered the life that God intended for him, and he had said that he did not want it; his chance had come, and he had refused to consider it.

"It's all over with me now," he said to himself, as he went plodding wearily up the hill to school.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT the school gates he met a lady, who smiled and bowed to him as he passed; he raised his hat to her in an absent manner, but he did not know who she was.

"Hello, Enday!" said Robertson, who was seated with some other boys on the steps. "Did she speak to you?"

"Hello," said Amos, gloomily. "Who was she?"

"That's Miss Harmon, you Chinaman. She's just been in to see old B. F. and she's going to give a party for the Track Team, because we won the Meet. Didn't she say anything about it?"

"No," said Amos. "She doesn't know me."

"Well, she saw your ribbon. It's going to be a great party; she's an old friend of old B. F's."

"Oh, I guess I won't go."

"Why not, you crazy? She wants you to."

"I don't feel well," Amos said. "When is her old party?"

"To-morrow afternoon."

Amos went to his room, flung down his suitcase, and stood at the window, looking out. Far down the road he could see Miss Harmon, walking towards the village.

"Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "It's coming at just the

worst time! Dress all up and stew around with a lot of society people! I wish they'd let me alone."

He looked about him at the familiar things of his den. Here he had thought himself safe and free, out of the reach of trouble. But for how long? Till June. Then he would have to go out into the world, which had offered him his chance. He had refused it. That was trouble enough. And now, this party! He was asked to see a crowd of people whom he had never seen before and would never see again; they would hear that he had thrown away his chance, and they would laugh at him. What an incredible fool he had been!

He went out by the rear door, in order to avoid his comrades, and stumbled along down to the boat-house. He took a boat, to be alone with his misery, and rowed out across the lake.

They had offered him his chance. "Here's your start in life," they had said. "Here's your success. You want a place in the world, don't you? And a happy and comfortable home, and some measure of ease, and safety and freedom from worry for the rest of your life? Well, here it is." And he—poor blind idiot—had answered, "Thanks very much, but I don't care for it." It was pitiful, and comic! If you wanted to see something ridiculous, take a look at Amos Enday! Hadn't he known, perfectly well, that opportunity comes but once?

He gave a savage pull at his oars, shipped them, and let his boat drift noiselessly in among the rushes in a little inlet in the wooded shore. He came gliding in,

spreading ripples. The bow stopped in the soft sand.

He raised his eyes, and there on the bank, looking up at him in surprise from a book which she was holding in her lap, was a girl.

He had never seen her before, yet she was a friend. In a flash of instant recognition he knew her. She was one of his people. She was all he had ever hoped for. There she was.

Her hair was black, under a broad-brimmed hat, and her eyes were blue—a soft and tender blue, he thought. Her eyes were so frank, and her face so friendly! She wore a dark dress with a V neck, and a broad white tie. She held her book in her small brown hands and looked out at him, over the tops of the trembling rushes. There was an alert look about her, showing clearly through her beauty, a keen, questioning, understanding look, that seemed to put a spell on Amos, though he had never seen anything like it, in all his life, and moved him to declare himself.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, looking straight at her. “I didn’t know you were here.”

“How should you know?” she said.

“Why, it seems to me I should have,” he answered, smiling at her.

“Well, perhaps you should, after all.”

Had she said that? Was it possible? And could any human girl have a voice so sweet?

“You’re sure I’m not interrupting you?”

“No,” she answered. “Truly.” And she closed her book.

"My name is Enday. I'm up at school."

She nodded. "I saw you, at the Meet," she said. "You had a number six on your back, didn't you?"

"Yes." He looked up at her expectantly.

"My name is Harmon; Joan Harmon."

"That's just like you, that name; you couldn't be named anything else, if you tried. Oh, then the lady I met was your mother?"

"No; my aunt. My mother's not here. Where did you meet her?"

"I just passed her at the gates of school; she was coming out."

"Oh. She went up to see Dr. Kimber—I mean, old B. F. She's a friend of his, and she's going to give a party for the Track Team to-morrow, to celebrate."

"Yes, somebody told me that; Robby, I guess it was. Where's the celebration going to be?"

"At her house." She hesitated slightly, and then added, "At home."

"Oh!" Amos exclaimed. "And I was just saying I didn't want to go! I thought I wouldn't know anybody there!"

"Why, all your friends will be there."

"Yes; I know that now. But I didn't, five minutes ago."

"I must go home," she said suddenly, getting up.

"Isn't it strange?" he said. "I came out on the lake because I was unhappy, and I didn't want to see anybody. And now—why, I might have known I

couldn't be unhappy for very long, if only I'd look around a little."

He looked up at her as she stood with the woods at her back, the soft light from the water reflected up on her face. He wanted to say something to keep her, but he could find no words.

"Then I shall see you at Miss Harmon's?"

"I shall be very pleased," she said politely. "Good-by."

She moved away among the trees, and Amos let her go several steps before he could speak.

"Good-by," he said.

She turned back for a second.

He had a glimpse of her white tie through the twilight of the woods, and then she was gone.

He rowed back as hard as he could pull; the water roared about his boat. Oh, but she was wonderful! Life was wonderful! The whole world was different; see how the sun shone!

He climbed out on the float, and looked back towards the other shore. It was barely recognizable; he would not have known that he had ever seen it before.

He had forgotten to tie up his boat, and it went slowly drifting away; he threw himself recklessly into another, and went in pursuit of it.

He ran up the hill to school, and found Robertson still sitting stolidly on the steps, just as if nothing had happened.

"Feeling better, aren't you?" Robertson said.

Amos went to the party with Harvey. As they came up the path they heard the patter of conversation within, and saw Miss Harmon presiding at her tea-table, with the girls whom she had invited to help her entertain the Track Team.

As the two came in, Miss Harmon saw them; the boys, following her glance and smile of welcome, burst out into the school cheer, putting Harvey's name at the end, and then repeating it for Amos.

They stood quiet, embarrassed at this reception; Amos' eyes were seeking Joan, seeing nothing else, caring for nothing else.

She came forward to meet him, took his hand for a second, and brought him up to be presented to her aunt. Miss Harmon was gracious and pleasant; every one was gracious and pleasant. All the best people in the world, it seemed, were gathered in that one room. And it was no longer ago than yesterday that he had been accusing himself of stupidity, saying that he was lost, that he had given up his golden opportunity!

"I'm afraid I was rude yesterday," he told Joan. He didn't think so at all, but he felt that he must say something personal, something to make her remember that they had met before, and would prevent her from drifting away among the others.

"Why?" she said. "That wasn't a private place of my own, you know."

"I was afraid it was," he answered. "I just came blundering in, without asking. But I was unhappy, and I didn't really see where I was going."

"You didn't seem unhappy."

"Well, I saw you before you saw me, and so . . . You see, I'd just come from home, and I hadn't had time, yet, to be glad I was back at school."

"And you were thinking that you'd have to be going back home sometime? Was that it? "

Almost it seemed as if Joan knew Phanor and Isabel.

"Yes," he said. "My father and mother are in such a frightful rush to get me out into the world, and get me started. I want to go, too, but not exactly the way they've decided on."

"What way is that? "

"Their way, you mean? To get a common everyday job, and be successful at it, and settle down. 'The Approbation of One's Fellows,' is what my father calls it."

"How horrid! I know. You wish they were all sunk to the bottom of the ocean, and yet you don't really wish that at all."

"Yes; you don't want to hurt their feelings. If you didn't care about them, it would be all right. They keep saying, 'Now, then, boy; show some ambition!' and all the time they're standing in the background, ready to cry if you give so much as a chirp."

Miss Harmon called to Joan.

"Oh, excuse me just a moment," she said, and left him.

She had implied that she would come back; this made endurable the next ten minutes, while he was talking with another girl. Young Duncan strolled up

and joined them; Amos was in a panic of fear that he was caught in a trap, and would never get away again. Then he heard Miss Harmon calling his name, and turned to see her beckoning to him, with Joan beside her.

"It's too bad you're new to Sheridan," she said. "I'm sure we should have seen you here before, if you'd been in school all the four years."

"I'm sure you would have," Amos said. "If I'd had any luck."

"I've known Doctor Kimber for a great many years—almost too many to confess," Miss Harmon said. "And I feel as if all the boys in the school were my personal property."

"That's the way I feel about it, myself," Amos said. "I wish you'd let me come down to . . . to call."

"I'd be delighted to have you come."

"Yes; do," said Joan.

"If I knew when you'd be at home," he said, turning to her.

"Why, come in for tea. I'm always here then."

"Well, then you'll be here to-morrow, won't you? "

"Of course."

"I'll be here myself," Amos said.

In the bewildering weeks that followed, Amos saw life first from one side, then from another; he loved Joan, for herself; then he loved all that she represented.

He watched her as she poured the tea, or talked, or

walked beside him down a country road, or turned the leaves of a book from which she was reading aloud—it was fascinating to watch her do anything and everything. In those slender brown hands of hers she held the reins of days and years, making life go straight forward along the road she had marked out for it; yet it was the road along which life seemed miraculously to want to go.

She had crossed the Atlantic when she was three years old, for she had been born in England. Did that explain something? He knew that this could not be true; there must be stupid people in England, as everywhere else. No, it was Joan herself who was so wonderful.

Perhaps the secret lay with her parents. Her mother, it seemed, was lovely . . .

“She would be,” Amos said.

Her father must be a great author or statesman or musician; only so could he have given his daughter so clear and vivid a vision of life.

“Oh, no,” she told him, laughing. “He sells heavy machinery, for an American firm in London.”

This was another marvel. Could a man just be in ordinary business, and still be real? Could a man live all his life, so to speak, hand in hand with heavy machinery, and not be blinded and deafened to the meaning of the world? Was it, after all, true that it was who a man is that matters, and not what he does?

And there Joan sat, reading from some book she loved; he watched her lips, marveling that any voice

could be so sweet, waiting for her to lift her eyes to ask him if he did not love it too. England, her lovely mother, her father who was so wonderful, her gracious aunt, this house at Lakewood, the books . . . it was all clear, yet still a miracle. Had this made Joan, or was it Joan who had made this? Had she come from the Eternal Spirit, or was she herself the Spirit? Oh, but to put it simply, he loved her.

Then, at times, it was the world around her that he loved. He had known this world to exist, and that there were these people in it; all his life he had been hoping to find them. His own hopes and dreams and crying needs were confirmed by this world, and strengthened. Joan taught him that it was not necessary to give up anything.

"Oh, if I'd only known that life was like this! " he said to her. "If I'd only known! "

"But you did know."

"Yes, really, I did. I knew it all the time. But, you see, I'd never met a single solitary person, in all my life, that made it come true. I knew it was there, but I didn't trust my own sight, all alone; and I didn't dare go out to look."

"It takes such a lot of courage to go out all alone," Joan said. "You have to turn your back on things that are sure, and go ahead without seeing a single step of the way. You get to thinking that you only hope these things are so, because you can't see them from where you stand."

"Yes. I did that I used to think, 'If this is true,

then somebody, somewhere, will see it, and tell me I'm right.' Only, I never found anybody like that. Not till now."

"No one could tell you. You've got to see it for yourself."

"Somebody did tell me, though. Somebody with blue eyes. Oh, I suppose you're right; I must have known it, all along, or I wouldn't have believed it when you told me."

Joan nodded.

"Well, it's too late now," Amos sighed.

"Oh, that's not true. It's not true at all."

"It is, though. I've spent too much time muddling around. If I should start now, I'd fail."

"Oh, you poor thing! " Joan exclaimed. "They've convinced you, haven't they? Why, the only possible way to 'fail' is not to start! "

"I guess you're forgetting who I am, and where I've come from."

"No, I'm not," she said. "I'm remembering. You're *you*; that's all that matters."

"Of course I know that. But they don't. At every step, I'd have to stop and ask myself, 'Good Lord, boy; what's going to become of you?' And as soon as that's asked, it's got to be answered, and to say, 'I don't know yet,' isn't any answer."

He had been taught to fear uncertainty, and experiment, and failure. His parents had told him that he must make up his mind before the chance came; that there was danger in expecting too much from life; that

you never knew, until it was too late. Now abideth these three: Uncertainty, Experiment, and Failure. And the greatest of these is failure.

"It wasn't for myself I was afraid," he told Joan. "I couldn't have been unhappier, no matter what happened. I've been where I could reach up and touch bottom. But it was for my father and mother. They were the ones that failure would hurt, not me."

"There's always somebody to hurt," Joan said. "No matter which way you go."

He stood at the window of his room, looking out down the valley. There were the hills, and the roofs of the houses showing through the tops of the trees; over there, out of sight, but never, never out of mind, was Wilton, and 97 Elm Street was there; Phanor would be sitting there, with his paper on his knees, deep in his chair, with Isabel across the table from him, reading or sewing. They were thinking of him.

He imagined himself bursting in on them.

"I'm through with all this," he would say.

"With all what?" they would ask. They would be wondering what had happened to steal away his wits.

"With all this nonsense of failing or succeeding, of being safe or being alive, with home and the Mill, and"—Ah, this was the hard part of it!—"and you."

They would say that that was a pretty way to talk, and ask him what they had done to be treated so. And what would he find to say to that?

"I'm sorry." That was all that could be said. "I'm not going to live as you've planned for me."

"What are you going to do, then? "

"I don't know; something glorious."

That was it; they would keep after him until they made him make some definite statement of his own side of the matter; then they would judge it as if it came within their own field of vision, and tell him that it wouldn't work. They would laugh at him, as they did when he wanted to go to Europe with Burton.

He thought of Burton. Where was he now? Burton had tried to do it; he had tried to make life come true, and he had not been strong enough. Just as he was on his highest crest of hope, adversity had touched him, and he had gone down. That was Burton's case. Well, in his own case, what assurance had he that he would not fail, too? He could live only once.

He thought of Belle. The idea of her was distasteful to him. Try as he would, he could see her only as he saw her that last time. But, at least, Belle had gone her own road. Whatever it was she wanted, she had been brave enough to start for it. Well, she was dead now, and she knew about it all.

Brave enough? How was she brave? She had seen but one side of it; there was no such thing, for her, as danger. She had been prejudiced and biassed, and she had never been called upon to make a choice. How grateful she ought to be for that!

He thought of Constance. What did she amount to?

What had she to give? She saw only one side, too. She was safe, Constance would never know whether the skies fell or not.

But Joan saw both sides. Joan was brave. No one was warning her, clutching at her to pull her back, but, even so, she knew that life required faith and courage. Joan was infinitely precious; she was the most precious thing that life had produced.

He sat wearily down at his desk and got out a sheet of letter paper.

MY DEAR FATHER:

The weather has been wonderful, these last few days, and I've tried to get outdoors as much as I could. I haven't done anything in athletics since the Spring Meet, because I can't do anything but the mile, and there isn't time to train for anything else.

This morning we got our marks in the Latin Test I wrote you about, and I came out second, and Mr. Wheeler read my paper aloud to the class to show them how it should be done. I think I got a good mark in History, too, but we won't find out about that for a day or two. Everybody is getting ready for graduation.

Miss Harmon, a lady in Lakewood, a friend of Doctor Kimber's, gave a party a week or so ago, for the Track Team, and I went down, and met some nice people, and now I spend all the time I can at her house.

My love to mother.

Affectionately,

AMOS.

He read the letter over before putting it in the envelope. He had set a cautious train, as a preliminary,

—that remark about the nice people. It would show his father how matters stood. Of course, it would make his father uneasy, but he might as well have it over with.

Sure enough, Phanor wrote, in a day or so, to say that he hoped Amos' social activities would not take too much of his time away from his studies.

"I'm going back to England in June," Joan told him.

At first he was thrilled. That she could so calmly announce such a thing! Well, so could he, and so could any one; but Joan could make it come true.

Then he began to realize the loss to himself.

"I'll be sorry to have you go," he said.

"I'm sorry, too, in a way. But I haven't been back for more than a year, and Dad wants me home for his vacation."

"Have you liked it in Lakewood? "

"You know I have," she said, looking steadily at him.

"I've felt responsible for Lakewood, you know," he smiled at her. "I've wanted, all the time, to make it a place you'd like."

"It's been in good hands," Joan said. "I've loved it."

He was silent for a moment, following her in his thoughts.

"I've never been to England," he said.

"I know. It's strange. Why haven't you? "

"Why haven't I? Why, think who I am! "

"I was thinking just that. You . . . you have all the world for your own, if you want it."

"If I'm not afraid to take it, you mean."

"Afraid! " she exclaimed. "What could you possibly be afraid of? Amos . . . don't you see what you have? "

He looked down at her; her eyes were shining, looking into his own. Had she wanted him to see it? Was it this that she was trying to tell him?

But no; she was going to England, where he would never be able to see her again; the mere knowledge that she was going put her forever beyond his reach.

She put her hand on his arm.

"Oh, Joan, listen! " he cried. "You know all about me; you've seen through me in a way I didn't think was possible. Don't think I don't understand, too. In another month, I'll be starting; I don't know how, or where—but I'll make a place in the world. I can't do any more than that."

"No," Joan said. "There's no more than that to say, for any one. Only—be sure you make a place you'll like."

"If I do . . . will you like it? "

"I want you to like it, for yourself. Only—be sure! You know. You see what it is that you hold in your hands. Nothing in the whole world counts but that."

"I know. But I'll have to wait."

"If you wait," Joan said, "it's always too late."

An air of indifference and carelessness began to be felt in the school; lessons were not so strongly insisted on, and delinquencies were passed without comment; teachers gave holidays, and curtailed the length of recitations; it was evident, in a score of ways, that the end was at hand. There was very little studying done in the dens of the Seniors in West House; the study hour was taken up with visits between the boys, who looked back over their school-days, and talked of the days that were to come.

And as for Amos Enday, what was he to do?

What had Joan meant? It all came back to that. Did she mean . . . but he was trapped, no matter what she meant. He must do something, must get ahead, must make a place for himself. He must be prudent. To much was at stake to admit of any error in choice.

The hour had struck; the Day of Judgment was at hand.

"My dear young friends," Doctor Kimber had said, in his last address to the school on graduation day, "My dear young friends, you are about to go out into the world. It will not make much of you, until you have won for yourselves the right to attention. Some things will be easier than you have dared to hope; you will meet hard and trying times—harder and more trying than you had thought it possible for any man to go through with, and live. But be of good courage. I have watched boys go out, as you are going out, for thirty years, and I can give you, out of that experience,

no better counsel than that: be of good courage. Fix your eyes on a goal that is worthy of you, and fight for it, straight, hard, ceaselessly; never look back, take no heed of the distracting advice of those who run beside you. Do this, and you will remember your days at Sheridan with gratitude, and Sheridan, watching you from this hill-top, will see your progress with pride—her Boys! ”

This was all very fine, and deeply moving. But the Doctor hadn't said a word about prudence. He hadn't told you how you were to select your worthy goal. He didn't say if your father was one of those who ran beside you, whose distracting advice you were not to heed. In short, he said that you were right, in principle, but he didn't tell you how to act.

There was a reception in the Hall after the graduating ceremonies. Joan was there, with Miss Harmon.

Amos saw her in the crowd, and made his way to her.

“Amos,” she said. “We're sailing to-morrow. Would you . . . I'd like it if you could come down to see us off.”

“Oh!” Amos said. “Why, I'd love it! It will make me unhappy, I suppose, but I don't care for that.”

“I think it will make me unhappy, too,” Joan said. “But I'd like to see you again before we go.”

Prudence, forsooth! Prudence could go and hide her foolish head!

Amos arrived in New York. He was miserably unhappy, stirred with emotion, and frightened. Presently, within a few short hours, his heart would be broken—and this great city did not seem to care. All about him, in the strange streets, people were hurrying along on their own business, indifferent and unexcited, seeing only the small circle of their own separate worlds.

He must find a florist. Yes, that was what he had to do. He must find a florist.

"I want some flowers," he said, walking into the shop, "to give to a lady that's going away."

"Yes, sir," said the florist, briskly. "What'll it be?"

And he looked like a kind man, too.

The streets were endless, enormous. Over the roofs of the nearer houses he could see great buildings, towering up into the sky, miles away; there was no end to it. And it was all no more than a pin-point in the world! From the deck of a departing ship, how soon would it fade to an invisible speck!

The wharf was a huge gloomy place.

"Can I get a pass to go on board the ship?" Amos asked of a man in the office at the entrance. "I'm seeing some one off."

The man did not put his hand on his shoulder and say, "My God! Poor fellow!" He wrote out a pass.

From the deck he could see the steel blue water of the river; towboats went churning past the end of the

slip, breathing hard; lighters were rolling gently beside the wharves; a greasy little power-boat noisily sidled off with the current, the man in it, smoking a pipe, as if nothing were wrong, waved his hand to the crowd on the liner. The winches rattled and spouted steam, and the derrick-booms swung and grated.

There was the harbor, leading out to sea; a mist hung over the water, mercifully hiding the horizon. And Joan was going away! Those men, who joked as they worked, were getting this ship ready to go to sea! He wanted to cry out to them, to tell them that they didn't know what they were doing; that they were taking Joan away.

He found her, at last. She was standing by the rail, watching the gangway.

"Joan," he said.

"Oh! I've been watching. I was beginning to be afraid you weren't coming."

He put his flowers in her arms, without a word. She hid her face in the blossoms.

"I can't stand this," he said.

She looked away for a second, and turned back smiling. She seemed to want to help him.

"It's exciting, isn't it?" she said. "I remember seeing people off, when I wasn't going myself. You feel so lost." •

"I've never seen anybody off before. No, that doesn't matter. It's just that I've never seen you . . . go away . . . before."

Miss Harmon joined them.

"Oh, Amos! I'm glad you could come. What lovely flowers! "

"I didn't know this was going to be so awful," he told her.

She smiled, and put her hand on his arm.

She was one of his people. She was friendly, and strong and dependable. Couldn't she tell him that he had never had a father and mother; that there had never been any such place as Wilton?

She changed the subject, very deliberately.

"Would you mind—I'm going to ask you to be good enough to post these letters when you go back. Would you? "

"I'd be glad to," he managed to say.

As Miss Harmon turned away, he saw a man on the bridge above his head; he came to the rail, and leaned on it for a moment, looking down. The Captain . . . the pilot . . . he was going to take this ship out, in spite of everything.

"We have a nice cabin," Joan said. "Would you come down, just for a moment? "

He followed her down the stairs and along the passage; a small close passage, dimly lit, with a wood rail along the side; people were visible in the doors of the staterooms as he passed, hanging up coats, fussing over packages, quieting children. He saw these things but dimly; his eyes were filled with Joan, moving on ahead of him. Couldn't he reach out and catch her? Couldn't he take her in his arms, and hold her—hold her close—and never let her go?

Her cabin was hushed and secluded; the noises from the deck came down remotely, as if from a great distance. The port light, from which the curtains were drawn back, stared stupidly out against the blank wall of the wharf; how soon would it look out over the sea! There was the bed in which she would sleep. A suitcase lay on the sofa. A cloak was hanging on the back of the door.

"Joan," he said. "Joan, you're coming back, aren't you?"

"Why, yes," she replied. "I'm coming back. But you don't . . ." She did not finish, and he never knew what it was that she might have said.

She tried to smile at him, and failed, and tried again, and gave up, miserably.

Up above, the whistle blew. It was as if they were packed in a box with cotton wool; a far-away roar that shook the air.

He spread out his hands. "There," he said.

"You're the bravest person I know," he said. "You're not going to let yourself be frightened by this?"

She shook her head. "It's you," she said, "who mustn't be frightened—ever, of anything."

"I've got to go."

He took a step backward toward the door, stopped, and came forward again.

"Dear, I can't do anything, don't you see? I'm just . . . I'm nobody. I haven't any place, yet."

"I know."

"I'll do what I can," he said, trying to convince her and thus convince himself. "I'll try to make a place for you. But now—when it isn't done—I can't ask . . . I couldn't give . . ." His voice died away. Didn't she believe him?

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by."

She made an effort, and faced him, once more.

"Never forget," she said. "Never forget that you can have anything in the world, if only you want it . . . enough."

He did not dare to take her hand. He tried to say something more, and could not.

He put his hands on the sides of the door, and felt his way out into the passage.

If he had seen her standing there, looking after him, her eyes bright with enthusiasm for the way she was sending him out into the world to find his life for himself—if he had seen her, he would have misunderstood, and would have gone back.

But he did not know—he never knew—what she was trying to give him.

He was pushing his way up the stairs, struggling out to the deck, lunging desperately down the gangway to the wharf.

He saw the ship push out into the stream. Miss Harmon waved to him. Joan did not come. He saw the steam go up in a white plume, and heard the three farewell blasts of the whistle.

He turned back into the streets, wandering, some-

how, to the station. He stopped often, as if he were looking for something. But he did not know what he was looking for.

"This train for Wilton?" he asked the man at the gate.

"Wilton; yes, sir," the man said

He sank into a seat.

Oh, God damn me for a fool! Oh, hell! What have I done? What a fool, an utter, God-forgotten fool!

They made me do it! They sit there, always under foot, asking me to die for them! Why should I listen? God, why did I listen! What right have they to ask me to die for them? What right have they to sit there, year after year, and insist that I take nothing for myself? I hate it! I'm sick of it! Christ knows I'm sick to death of it!

How could I know enough not to trust them? How was I to tell that they never spoke the truth? I asked them what life was like, and they said, "Look out!" That was all they knew: "Look out!" There was danger on all sides, they said. Better stick close to home, they said. I've fought them—not a day of my life that I haven't fought them. And what's happened? Now, when I needed it—and Oh, I needed to be free this day, if ever a man needed to be free!—I called on myself for courage, and there's no answer. They've changed me. They've got me. They've built their sly damned criminal parlor in my own heart, and I can't get away from it. I'm done.

Oh, damn them, damn them! Damn everything!
Damn everything!

I'm through; I'm finished. I've gone to hell. And it doesn't matter.

Hours and days passed, and nothing was done about it. There seemed so little that could be done—now. If only he had made a firmer resistance, or had declared his independence before there was so much at stake! If, when he had first gone away to school . . . or before that . . . or when he was a baby. . . .

Well, there was nothing for it now but to skip all this part of life, to put it away behind him, and try never to think of it again.

He stumbled along up the dark road that led to the Winterbournes' farm.

Constance met him at the door, when he knocked.

"Why, Amos!" she exclaimed.

"Constance," he said. "Constance, will you marry me?"

"Oh, Jinks!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands to her breast. "Oh, my goodness gracious! Yes!"

Two hours later, Amos climbed onto the train and went along home to Wilton.

He stared down the length of the car under the smoky yellow lamps.

"Good Lord!" he said. "I've done for myself now!"

CHAPTER XV

AMOS ENDAY was married on the fifteenth of July, 1896.

"Gee, what a day!" he said. "I wouldn't have believed it could get so hot."

Phanor thought he knew what a bad wedding day was, but he couldn't make up his mind whether it was worse to freeze to death, as he had done when he himself was married, or to be broiled alive, as in the present instance. He stood at the window of the Winterbournes' sitting-room, looking out across the fields towards the river, watching the quivering heat-waves ascend ceaselessly from the baking ground. He kept telling everybody who passed that he was hoping for a breath of air, but that he didn't seem likely to get it.

"If I'd have known it was going to be a day like this," Amos said, "I'd been in favor of waiting."

"Well, that's a question," Phanor said. "We didn't see much but ice, when we were married. Remember, Isabel?"

Isabel was excited at having so many people about, and Phanor thought she was getting too tired, but she held out, and smiled bravely, taking pains that her happiness should be plainly evident, even through her suffering. She was, in fact, greatly pleased with the match; she "had always said" that Constance was a

good girl, who would make an excellent home for Amos. Now that the long anxiety was over, she felt—and made the others feel—that her son might have married any one of a number of girls. But she took good care that no one should ask which girls these were, and whenever she thought of the alternatives, she was relieved and happy again. She and Phanor had worried a great deal about getting Amos married to the right person—well, they couldn't have found any one they liked better, even if they had picked her out themselves, than Constance Winterbourne.


Phanor had been “fortunate enough” to “hold open” a place for Amos in the Wilton Mills; it was a position with Mr. Hungerford, who had recently been promoted to the superintendence of both the East and West Mills; Amos had refused it, to be sure, when it was first offered, but Phanor “had reason to hope” that this was but a temporary decision. And so it turned out. When he had brought the matter up again, at the close of school, his faith had been rewarded by the boy's complete acceptance.

Amos worked hard and devotedly, and he had been granted a raise in salary at the beginning of the year. He saw no reason, then, for further delay, for he did not dare all himself to question the wisdom of marrying Constance, and he told her that they could be married whenever she chose. She chose the first of June, but that was rather too close, and could not be made to fit in with Amos' vacation at the Mill, and he put it off till the fifteenth of July.

He had hunted for a house, and succeeded in finding an upstairs apartment in Elm Street, nearly opposite number 97, where he had been born. Constance had always wanted to live in Wilton, and was delighted with the arrangement of the rooms, and with the furniture, which they had been able to gather from stores and from the stocks of cast-offs in the garrets of the En-days and the Winterbournes. It was ready for them by the day of the wedding, and they went away for a brief honeymoon with the delicious sense that they were coming back to a regular home in an orderly world. Constance knew that this was exactly what Amos needed—though he was not always willing to admit that it was what he wanted—and she sat about the task of giving it to him, from the very moment of the wedding.

Everything went off very well indeed. The arrangements were all made by people who had themselves been married, and it soon became evident that things were going as they should. The most unpleasant possibility was in respect to Mr. Winterbourne, who had been carefully trained in the task of walking slowly enough to maintain the time of the Wedding March; but he justified the labor spent on him, and did not once overbalance. In every direction, special precautions were taken against unpleasant occurrences.

Following the actual ceremony, there was a period of twenty-two minutes for hand-shakings, congratulations, and kisses; then the bride and groom withdrew. As they appeared again, the carriage drew up at the



door. Constance wept for a moment on her mother's shoulder, and received a blessing and a kiss from her father; then they made their way down the steps, through the nearest and dearest, gathered in the doorway, and climbed into the carriage, which had been standing in the sun so long that it resembled an oven, and drove away.

In the quiet and darkened bedroom, where Phanor and Isabel went to get their things, he turned to her with a sigh.

"Crickey! " he said. " I can't help feeling relieved that it's all over."

" It has been hard," Isabel agreed. " But, thank Heaven, it came out all right in the end."

THE END

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